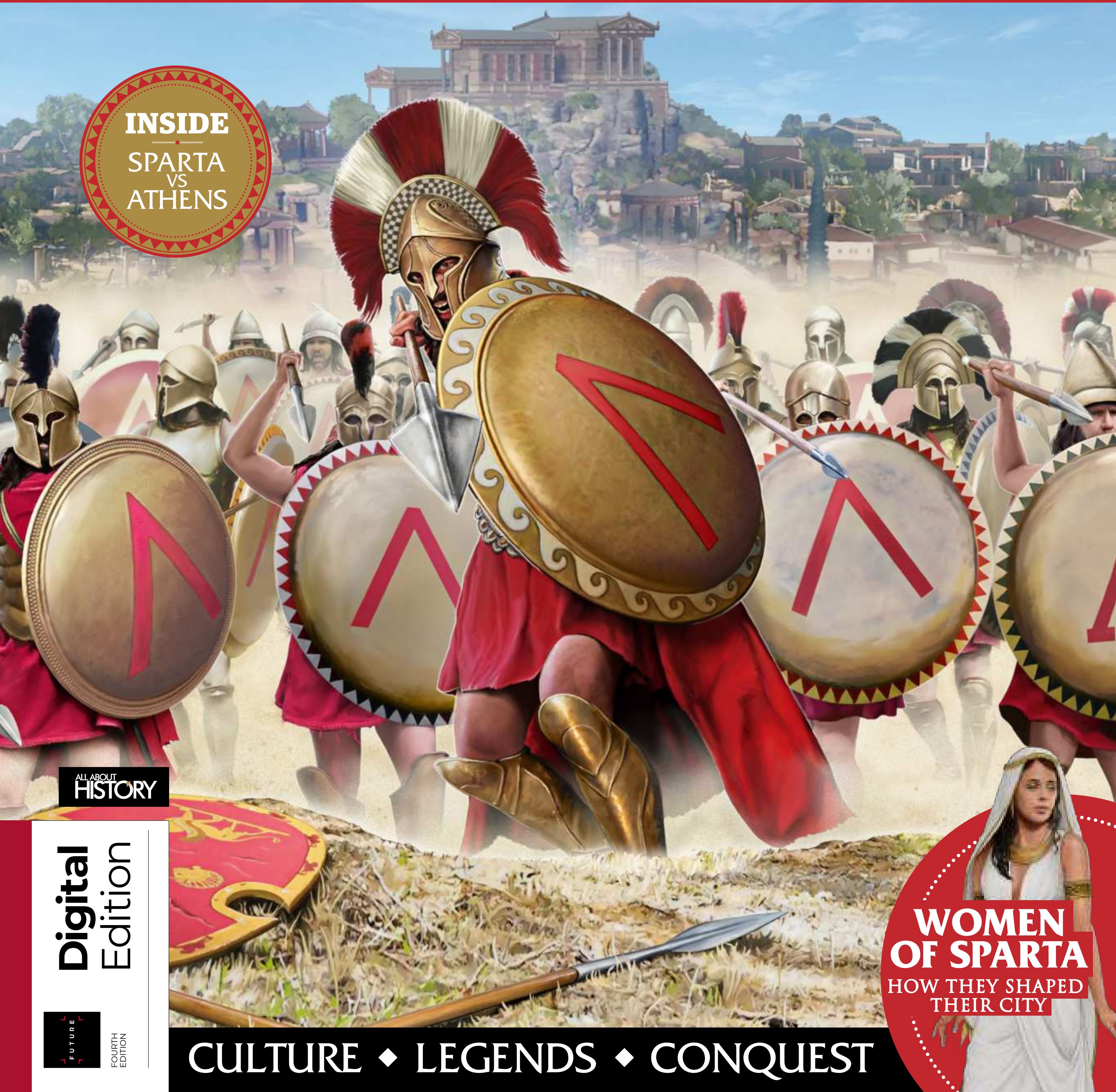
NEW

SPARTA

EXPLORE THE RISE AND FALL OF A WARRIOR STATE



INSIDE
SPARTA
VS
ATHENS

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Digital Edition

FUTURE

FOURTH EDITION

WOMEN OF SPARTA
HOW THEY SHAPED THEIR CITY

CULTURE ◆ LEGENDS ◆ CONQUEST

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

WHO GOES THERE?

Below a blazing sun you crunch along a stoney path surrounded by dusty hills on either side. Intrigued helots turn from their back-breaking work to stare at this outsider approaching. Ahead, a city of squat buildings looms ever closer, an imposing temple hunched behind them atop a steep mound. Neatly paved streets come into view now, each one snaking in between homes and stores and cutting a path around ancient pine trees. And then you see them - the suspicious eyes glaring out from behind glinting helmets, spears gripped tight at the ready. The guards rimming the city stand prepared to fight. They know not where you're from, but you are now in no doubt where you are: this is Sparta.

FUTURE

SPARTA

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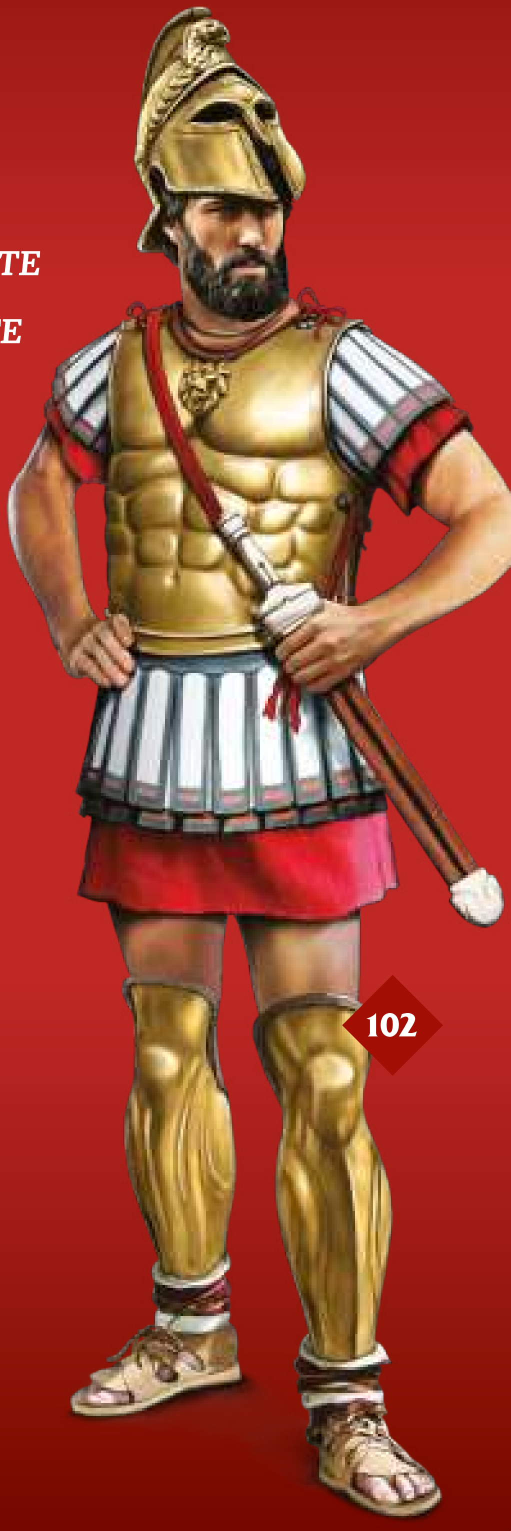

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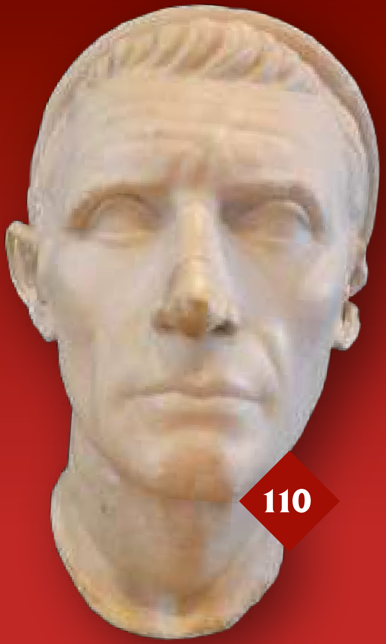
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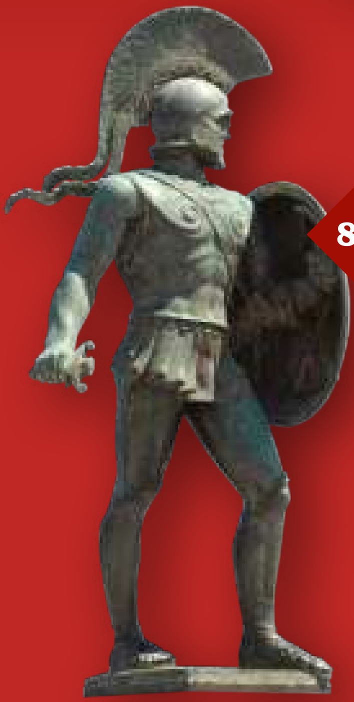
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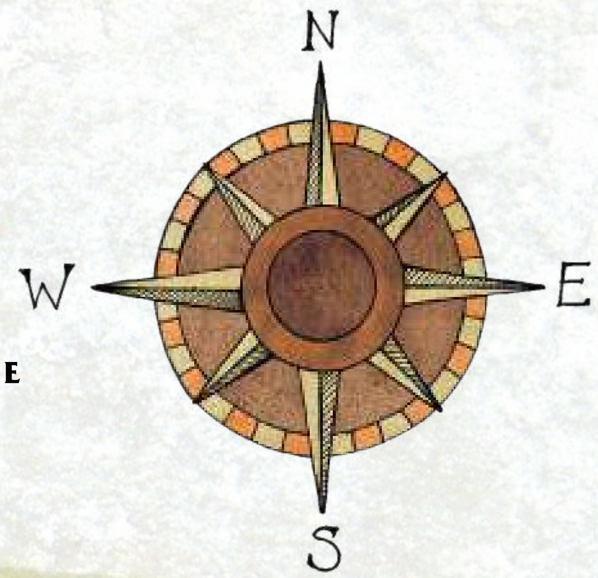
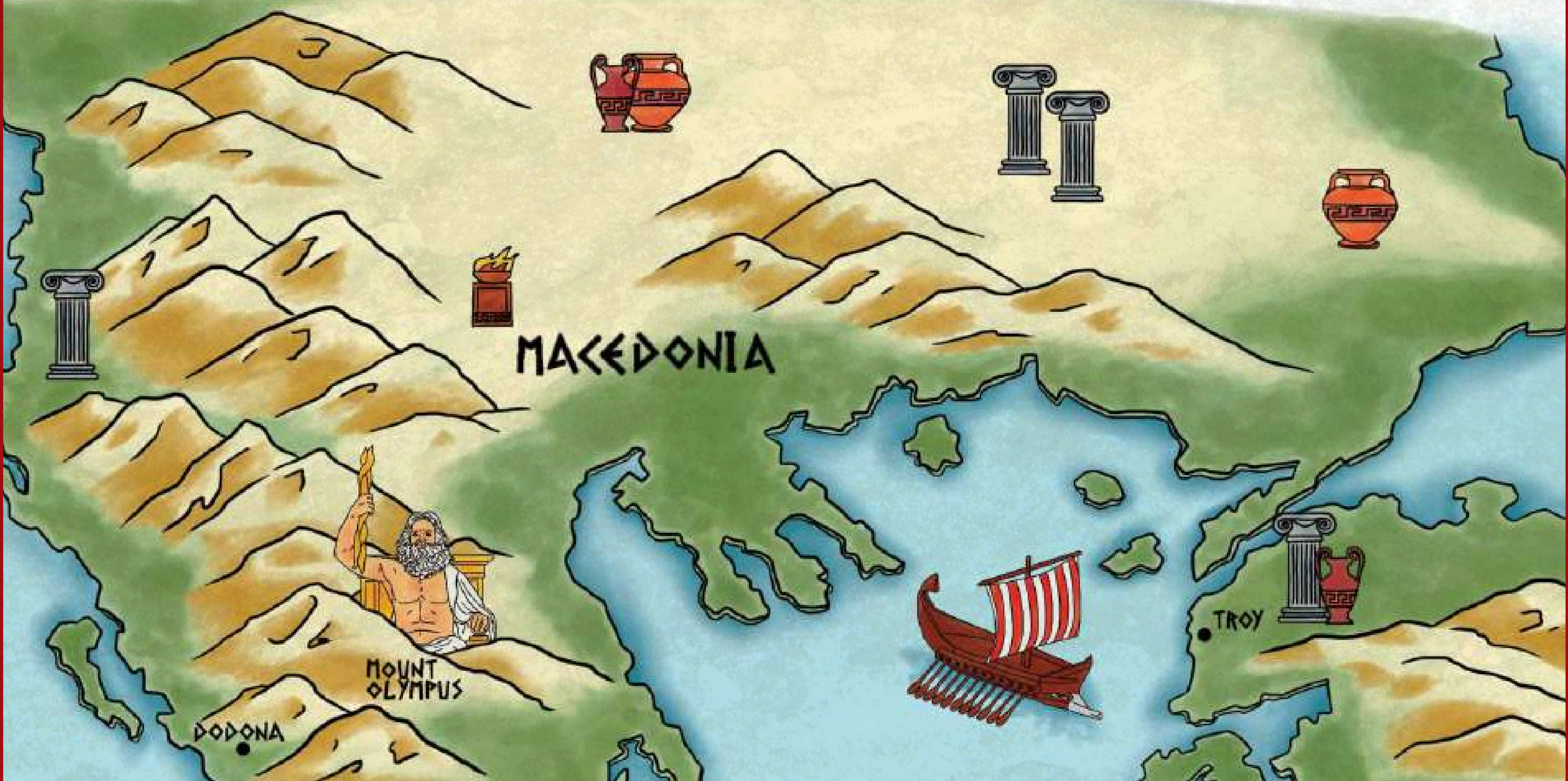
MAP OF
ANCIENT GREECE

A SMALL LAND THAT GAVE THE WORLD SO MUCH, ANCIENT GREECE CONTINUES TO INFLUENCE AND INSPIRE OVER 2,000 YEARS ON




MACEDONIA
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DODONA
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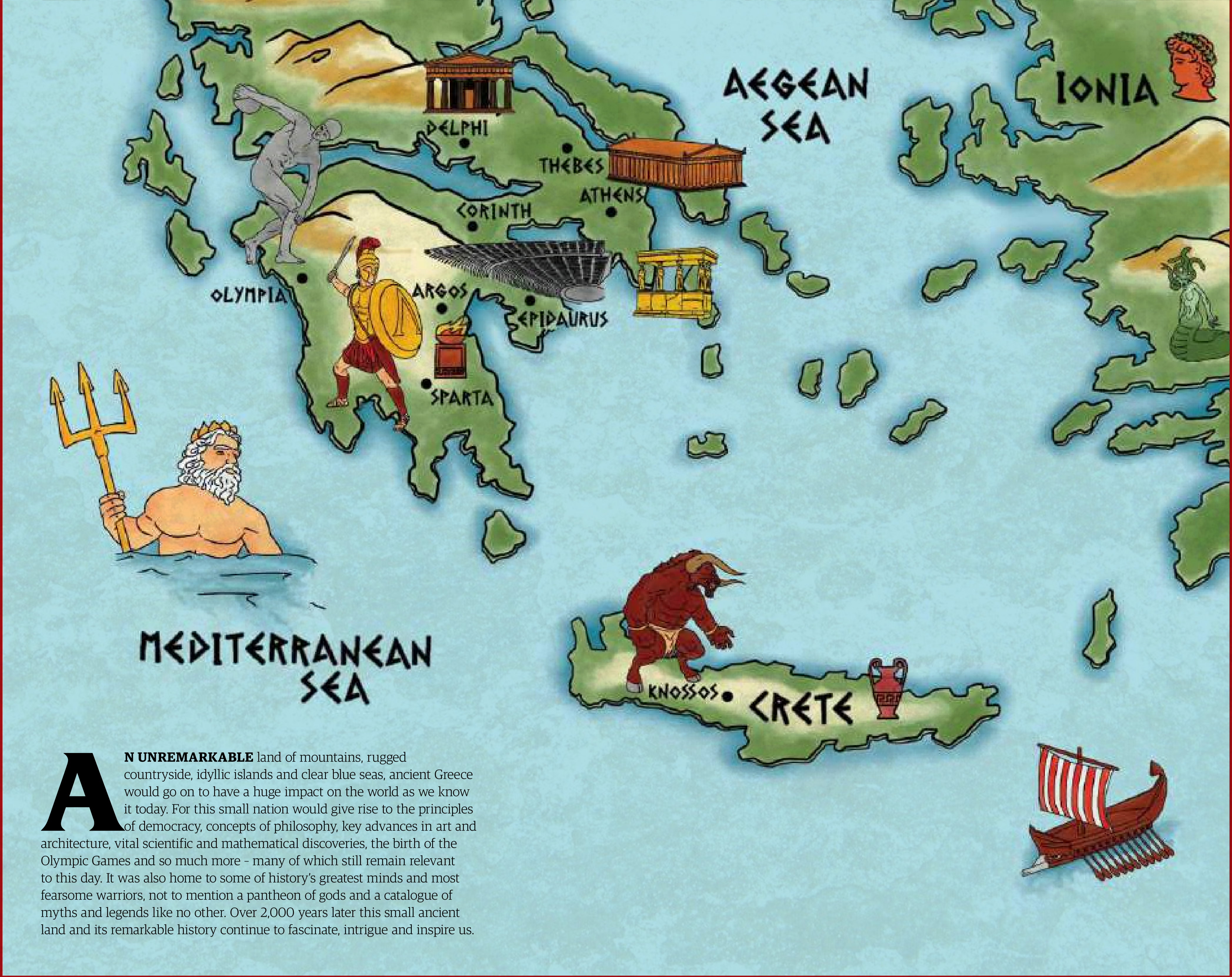
AEGEAN SEA
IONIA
DELPHI
THEBES
ATHENS
CORINTH
OLYMPIA
ARGOS
EPIDAURUS
SPARTA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
KNOSSOS
CRETE

N UNREMARKABLE land of mountains, rugged countryside, idyllic islands and clear blue seas, ancient Greece would go on to have a huge impact on the world as we know it today. For this small nation would give rise to the principles of democracy, concepts of philosophy, key advances in art and architecture, vital scientific and mathematical discoveries, the birth of the Olympic Games and so much more – many of which still remain relevant to this day. It was also home to some of history's greatest minds and most fearsome warriors, not to mention a pantheon of gods and a catalogue of myths and legends like no other. Over 2,000 years later this small ancient land and its remarkable history continue to fascinate, intrigue and inspire us.

RISE OF SPARTA

12 BIRTH OF SPARTA

Discover how a city that would one day inspire respect and fear across the entire Mediterranean was founded and governed

16 DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SPARTAN

From rising at dawn to watch the city walls to keeping your helots in line, a Spartan citizen's day was always demanding

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If they survived their first days, the sons of this brutal city were in for a tough life of hunger, training and war. Be in no doubt - this is Sparta!

24 ANATOMY OF A HOPLITE

Meet the formidable soldiers who dedicated their entire lives to the defence of their city

26 WOMEN OF SPARTA

Brace yourself - the ferocious females who called Sparta home were not the shy and retiring type. Find out how they helped to shape their homeland and raise a city of fighters

32 THE HELOTS OF SPARTA

Without their population of downtrodden slaves, the Spartans could never have hoped to dominate their rivals and fend off Persia. Find out what life was like for a helot

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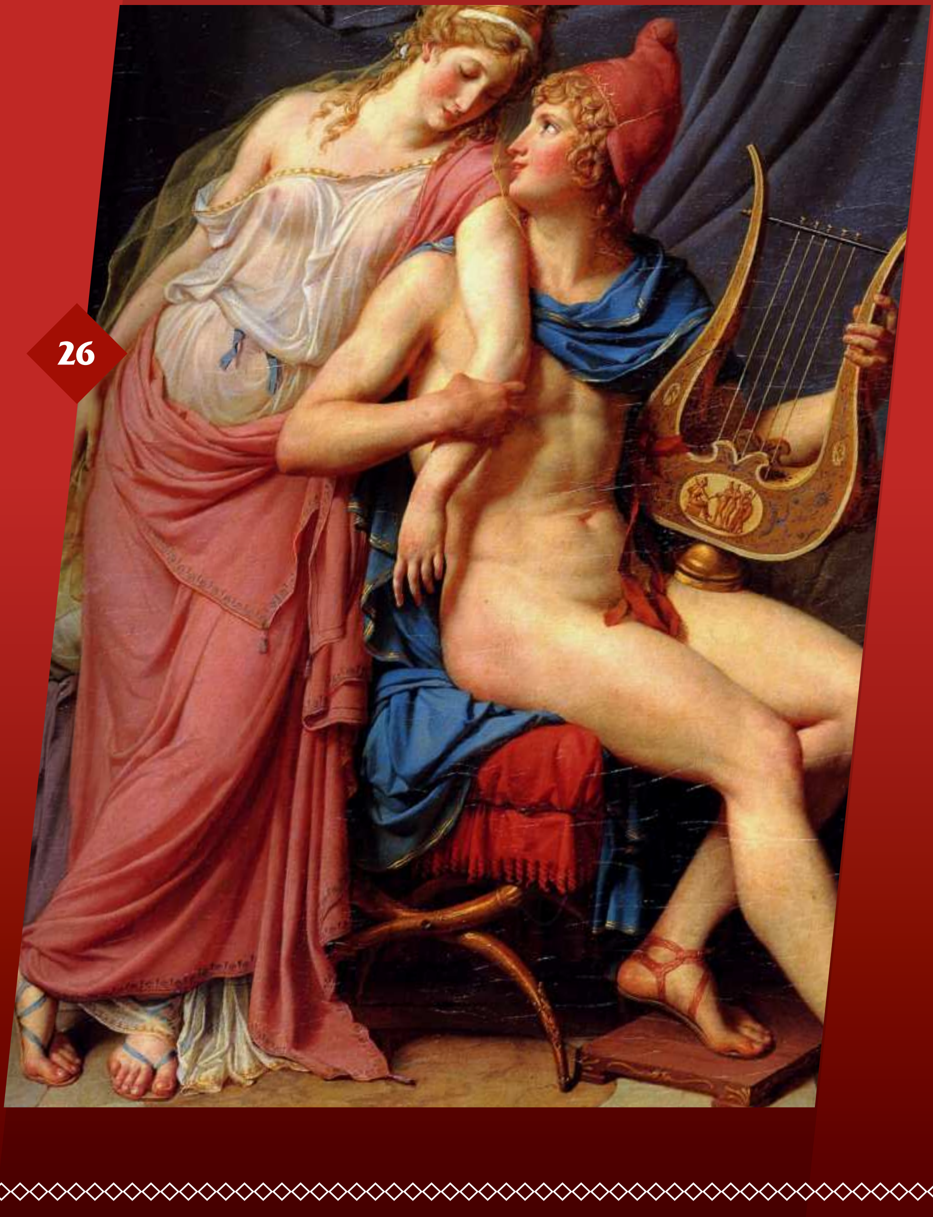
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THE BIRTH OF SPARTA

HOW THE WARRIOR NATION ROSE TO BECOME THE MOST FEARED CITY-STATE IN ALL OF GREECE

WORDS BY ◆ **STEVE WRIGHT**

TODAY THE name 'Sparta' conjures up a number of images – those of a nation populated by fearsome warriors, the figureheads of a society geared towards the promotion of militaristic might above all else. And, indeed, in a number of respects it was. As arguably the most prominent city-state in ancient Greece, tales of Sparta's prowess stretched far and wide and were well earned.

But just as a mighty oak is spawned from a single acorn, so too did Sparta rise from humble origins. While there is evidence of settlements and human activity as far back as 1500 BCE, the genesis of what would become recognisable as ancient Sparta occurred closer to 1000 BCE when the villages of Limnae, Pitana, Mesoa and Cynosoura, located in the Laconian region of southeast Greece, came together to form the state of Sparta. A fifth village, Amyclae, later joined the fold. The city's name means 'I sow', and considering its site it was an apt moniker; the surrounding Eurotas valley was fertile and abundant in food, giving it a fruitful foundation on which to expand.

Regarding the subsequent couple of centuries, it's difficult to say with absolute authority what the history of Sparta entailed. It's easy for history to become intertwined with mythology – especially where Greece is concerned – blurring the line between fact and fiction to the point of incomprehension. The lawmaker Lycurgus is credited with instituting the political and social reforms that turned Sparta into such a military-orientated state, but it isn't known for sure whether he actually existed. Even so, he remained at the very least a symbolic figure.

Regardless of how Sparta's dominating philosophy came about, its rise to power was largely thanks to its initiation of military conquest. In what would become known as the First and Second Messenian Wars, from 743-724 BCE and 685-668 BCE respectively, Sparta invaded and subjugated the neighbouring territory of Messenia. The aftermath would prove to be its making as a force among Greek city-states. Now controlling around 8,500 square kilometres of land, Sparta became the largest city-state in Greece. Powered by the conquered Messenians and another repressed group known as the helots, Sparta quickly grew strong. While the Messenians and helots performed all the agricultural tasks, the Spartans concerned themselves with the art of warfare and governance – both of which they excelled at.

In turn, the helots were firmly kept in their place. Sparta declared war on them yearly, regularly culling them to prevent numbers getting too high and press-ganging them into military service at a whim. This was done by a group of secret police known as the Krypteia, formed mainly of young Spartans undertaking part of their military training.

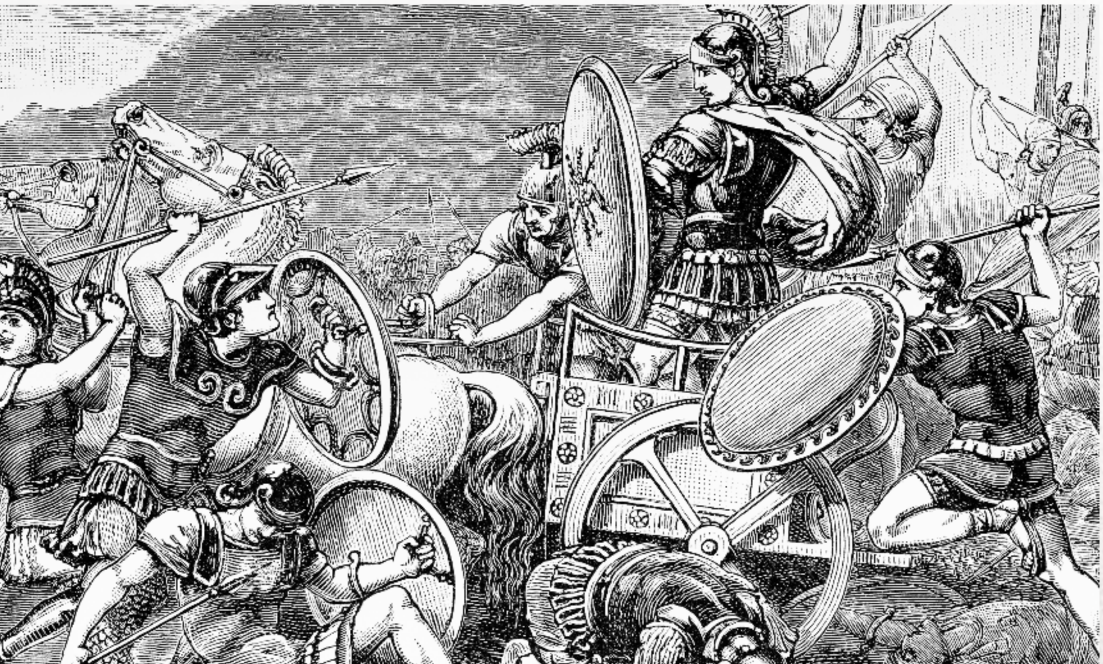
Emphasising the 'training' aspect of it, they were encouraged to hide during the day and attack unwary helots with knives under the cover of night.

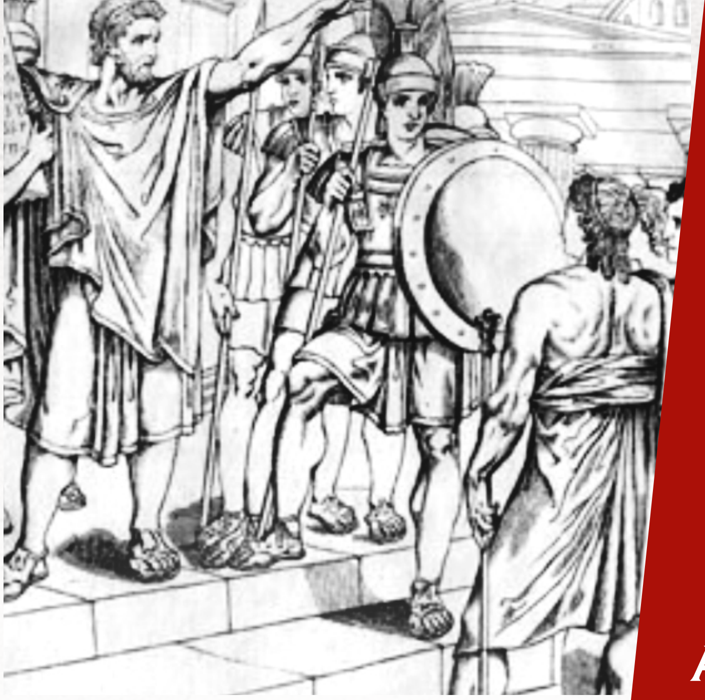
The helots comprised 90 per cent of the population, so the prospect of them rebelling – which they did on some occasions to disastrous effect, most notably during 464 BCE in what is sometimes known as the Third Messenian War, an incident that damaged relations with Athens and would come back to haunt Sparta during the Peloponnesian War of 431-404 BCE – was a constant worry.

Despite this apparent mistreatment of the helots and Messenians, the original Spartan population appeared to enjoy a certain level of social parity. Referred to as homoioi, or 'equals', land ownership was enjoyed by many of them. Also known as 'Spartiates', citizenship was only gained when individuals had passed Sparta's military training programme, known as agoge. In turn, only those who could trace their heritage back to the city's original inhabitants were allowed to participate in the agoge. Those who passed it became known as 'peers', a status they were allowed to keep so long as they continued to contribute a certain amount of grain to the army mess where they dined. In turn they slept in the military barracks until the age of 30 and served in the army until the age of 60.

Despite Sparta's warlike demeanour, its make-up wasn't overly patriarchal; unlike in other city-states, women were permitted to own land, and indeed many did. With such a high likelihood of their husbands being killed in battle, they would often inherit their estates – at one point around two-fifths of land in Sparta was female-owned – making it far more representative than many other civilisations at the time or indeed since.

> **"JUST AS A MIGHTY OAK IS SPAWNED FROM AN ACORN, SO TOO DID SPARTA RISE FROM HUMBLE ORIGINS"**





Surrounded by armed guards, Lycurgus dictates his legislative reformations to a rapt audience

The origins of the Spartans' system of governance remain mysterious. According to Plutarch, Lycurgus created the Spartan constitution, initially known as the Great Rhetra, after receiving counsel from the god Apollo via the oracle at Delphi. Spartans kept no written records themselves and coin-based money wasn't permitted, with iron bars known as obols serving as a substitute. In this manner material wealth wasn't a status symbol in Sparta; to gain a respected social standing, prized qualities included being a strong warrior, serving well in battle, keeping a productive farmstead and raising a strong, obedient family.

In addition, the Spartan system of governance was rather a unique one, melding together the institutions of hereditary monarchy and democracy. At the top of this system were two kings hailing from the Agiad and Eurypontid families, men who were always succeeded by their first-born sons. During wartime they served as supreme commanders of the Spartan army - by 480 BCE a law was put into place stipulating that one king must remain behind - while in peacetime they settled down to deal with more religious and legal-orientated issues, although civil and criminal cases were later passed onto the ephors. During this time they maintained communication with the oracle at Delphi and occasionally performed sacrifices when required to appease them.

Outside of the monarchy, the highest authority in Sparta was a council of elders known as the gerousia. Consisting of 28 'gerontocrats' plus the two kings, they were chosen by the assembly from a selection of Spartan 'champions', a status they qualified for upon reaching the age of 60, and were elected for life. Essentially the gerousia's primary purpose was to guard the state constitution, with this mandate involving providing advisory and legislative assistance to the government. They helped to submit proposals that would later go before the citizen assembly - such was their power, they could choose to prevent motions from being passed there. Additionally, they served as the Spartan branch of the supreme court, with the power to try and convict any Spartan citizen, even one of the kings.

Ranking slightly below the gerousia, although still of importance, was the apella, also known as the national assembly. Any Spartan aged 30 or above was allowed to join, with meetings taking place at the time of each full moon, always within the boundaries of Sparta. Essentially, during these meetings citizens were able to debate matters that had been put before them and discuss their potential outcomes. These were not trivial matters; topics included foreign policy and warfare - although the gerousia had the power to overrule these if the conclusions that were reached didn't match their interests - and they were responsible for selecting and electing individuals to the gerousia, with the best candidate singled out as the who man received the loudest applause.

Also elected by the apella were the five ephors. Serving as the rulers of Sparta alongside the two kings, some of them often ended up ruling Sparta while the kings were away in battle, usually accompanied by one or two ephors. Each ephor was required to serve a one-year term, a mechanism that effectively prevented them from becoming too powerful, and could call meetings of the gerousia. If the kings disagreed on a decision then the ephors usually had the deciding vote. Moreover, they took responsibility for some of the shadier operations that Sparta was involved in, such as the yearly declaration of war on the helots and the establishment of the Krypteia.

In this way it can be seen that Sparta expounded a government that, while in some respects appeared traditional with its inclusion of hereditary rulers, in others was quite progressive. Once citizens had made their contribution to society in the form of military service, there stood the possibility of them being able to put forward their voice in a constructive manner - or even put forward themselves to be held accountable. Considering how many European governments remained helmed by monarchies for thousands of years after Sparta ceased to exist as a force, their system of government becomes all the more interesting.

That's not to heap too much praise on it, however - the kings, ephors and gerousia were liable to dominate proceedings if left unchecked, and it was a system that largely only worked as it did due to the repression of the helots. Even so, it was a well-oiled, brutally efficient machine that enabled Sparta to consolidate its status as the most respected and feared of all of Greece's city-states.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

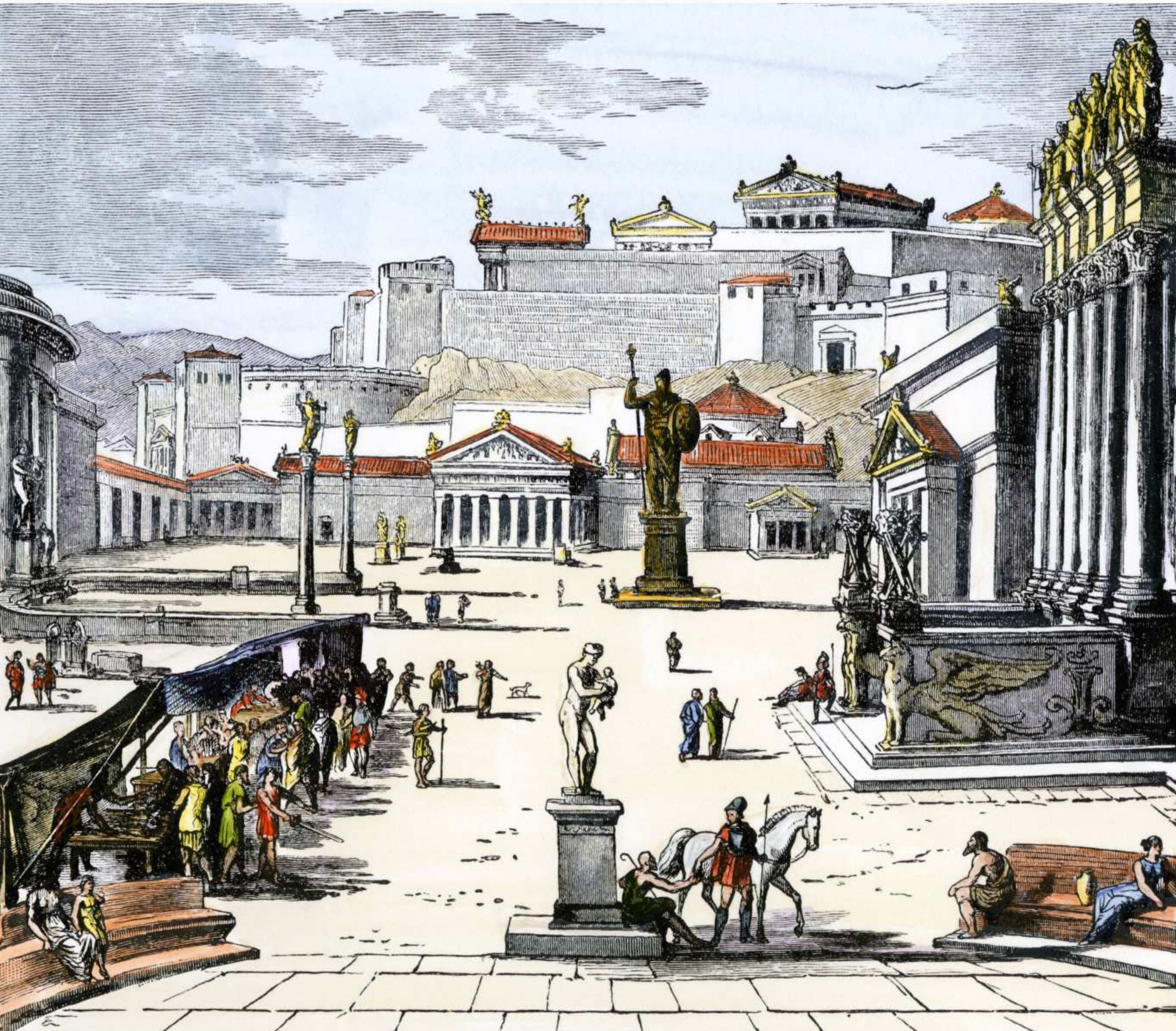
Greek mythology has a rather different take on Sparta's foundation than the one generally accepted in historical accounts. In this take Sparta was founded by Lacedaemon, the son of the Greek god Zeus and the Pleiad (daughters of the titan Atlas) known as Taygete. He went on to found its capital city, which he named 'Sparta' after his wife, the daughter of Eurotas, king of the surrounding region of Laconia. They went on to have three children: Amyclas, Eurydice and Asine. His legacy endured in a number of ways: firstly, he supposedly constructed the sanctuary at the Charites between Sparta and Amyclae, and a statue of him was erected in the nearby Therapne. Lacedaemon's future descendants included figures like Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, Helen of Sparta, Perseus, Heracles and Clytemnestra, the queen of Mycenae.

As time progressed, his name remained in use. In the Roman era 'Lacedaemon' was often used to describe the geographical area surrounding Sparta, with the word 'Sparta' being more associated with the city itself and the core area surrounding it.

DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ANCIENT SPARTAN CITIZEN

TO THRIVE and survive in ancient Sparta you had to be tough, physically fit and mentally strong. You would be required to embrace a military culture that geared itself for war. With no need to work the land - this was left to slaves - citizens could dedicate their time to military training. Boys began preparing for war from the age of seven and would become fully fledged soldiers and citizens by 20 years of age.

Although not deemed to be ready for a life of war, girls were made to train hard to stay fit, healthy and productive for Sparta. When they grew up they were tasked with raising families and being in charge of the Spartan household while the men trained for battle with enemy powers like Persia, or even rival city-states like Athens and Thebes.



MORNING WATCH

Sparta prided itself on its military strength. Unlike other ancient Greek city-states, Sparta had no walls, so men were required to defend the city. This meant an early start at the barracks for watch and training in case of invasion from rival city-states or even the Persians.

TRAIN, TRAIN, TRAIN

Spartan hoplites were trained to be the best and most feared warriors in the ancient world. Sparta was a warlike state that prided itself on its military culture. Men stuck to a strict regime, taught to them from a young age in a disciplined military academy to ensure that they were the fittest and best-drilled infantry around.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

All this military training meant Spartans built up a huge appetite. Popular foods and drinks in Sparta included cheese, figs and various meats washed down with wine. There was also the infamous black broth. A mixture of pigs legs and blood, it emphasised the Spartan penchant for simplistic, hearty and energising meals.

TIME FOR POLITICS

Spartans could have their say on the running of the city-state as part of the 'demos', a number of citizen voters. They would vote on options given to them by the 'gerousia', elders who sat on a council that supported the two kings, who ruled the city-state with assistance from officials known as 'ephors'.

CHECK ON YOUR HELOTS

The Spartan economy depended on the use of helots, slaves who farmed and traded while the men were at war. Citizens were forbidden to trade and instead helots bought and sold goods. The high number of slaves meant they formed their own class, and there were instances of them revolting against their rulers.

WORKING THE LAND

The fertile lands surrounding the city gave the population access to wheat and barley crops which were worked on by slaves. Production was important and all gains went to the state, not to individuals. There was no currency in Sparta, and luxury goods and hoarding gold or silver was banned.

IT'S NOT ALL WAR

The emphasis on the military doctrine was great, but there was still time for the more artistic aspects of ancient Greek culture too. Both men and women read poetry and made pottery. However, the primary Spartan appetite was always for battle, so maintaining peak physical fitness occupied a lot of time.

TIME FOR FAMILY

At the end of the day, citizens returned home to their families. Spartan men were only allowed to live with their wives after they had turned 30. As well as family life, Spartan men regularly socialised with their peers in 'messes', where they ate and trained together in small groups.

SPARTA: WARRIOR STATE

PAIN, CRUELTY AND BRUTAL TRAINING – LIFE FOR A BOY IN SPARTA WAS HARSH. EXPLORE THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR THROUGH THE EYES OF A SOLDIER PUSHED TO HIS LIMITS

WORDS BY • **BEN BIGGS**

COME BACK with your shield, or on it.” These were words that would resonate for any warrior, but for Aristodemus, even the memory of his mother’s voice reciting the Spartan rhetoric made him feel deeply ashamed. His hand gripped the shaft of his spear, knuckles whiter and palm slicker than those of his comrades, his focus narrowed to a pinpoint even through the visor of his full helm. This battle was important: retribution against the would-be invading army of Xerxes, for the sacrifice that the warrior king Leonidas and his chosen 300 Spartans made at Thermopylae the year before.

The story of his birth was a minor legend even in his own time: when the ephors - Sparta’s elder statesmen - took him from his mother to Mount Taygetos, Aristodemus was small and jaundiced. He was placed in the gorge for starvation, the weather or wild animals to take him - but the Spartan babe had no intention of going the same way as so many other newborns. In that cursed place he clung to ephor Sphodrias’ fingers so tightly that he was unable to shake this tiny child from his grasp. Beaten, and seeing the Spartan pup in a new light, Sphodrias had taken Aristodemus back to his mother to be reared at home.

In the light of what Aristodemus was about to do, Sphodrias might well have bashed him against the ground until his hand was released. But the elders weren’t around to judge him now, as Aristodemus broke rank and surged forward. One of his fellow hoplites tried to grab him but there was little purchase on his polished bronze cuirass. Besides, Aristodemus was fleet of foot even among his peers. He sprinted toward the advancing Persians, over 30 years of punitive daily training and cruel warrior trials pulsing through his mind.

He must have been three years old when he was left alone for hours in the pitch black of his home, bawling for his mother to light a lamp or to keep him company, to no avail. Then his mother would come home and temper his body by emptying an amphora full of stale wine over his head until his eyes stung. He’d been half-starved his whole life, but it was around this time that the gnawing in his stomach was unbearable. And then, like any other Spartan boy, he was taken away at the age of seven to become a Spartan paidion and to live in the barracks, lest his easy living with his mother soften him.

The next 12 years of his life were spent in the increasingly tough regime of the agoge. Mandatory to all male Spartan citizens except the firstborn sons of the royal houses, it was here Aristodemus was taught stealth, combat and communication among other disciplines. Above all, loyalty to Sparta was drummed into him to ensure when the time came he wouldn’t hesitate to put the state first.

Life in the agoge at least made sense of his early youth, even if the Spartan warrior fraternity was brutal. The entire agelai (the pack, or class) of Spartan youths Aristodemus was enrolled into were once stripped to the waist and flayed simultaneously - just to try their endurance. Their families watched, encouraging their sons to act like the Spartan warriors they aspired to be, to silently take the pain. After four strokes, Dion (who was particularly skilled at the fight-dance pyrriche and had the hallmarks of a future leader) cried out in anguish. His parents hissed at him from the sidelines and he was disgraced. Meanwhile, Aristodemus was still standing silently after 23 excruciating lashes. As the last paidion standing he had proved his mettle, and he was lifted onto the broad shoulders of his trainer while his mother beamed proudly at him. The thick scars that licked across his back were his trophies and a testament to his honour.

A reckless battle rage now took him as the faces in the Persian front line came into focus. Aristodemus could make out doubt, confusion and even a trace of fear in the half-helms of Xerxes’ so-called ‘Immortals’. A Spartan phalanx could break the confidence of the average soldier, and not even the Persian elite would willingly go toe-to-toe with a Spartan hoplite consumed with a thirst for revenge.

As he closed the final few dusty yards, the hard, bittersweet memories of his teenage years

MILESTONES OF A WARRIOR

Trial at birth
Age 0
Spartan boys were put to the test the moment they were born. They were taken from their mothers and brought to the Spartan elders, who decided whether the child would be brought up as a Spartan warrior or taken to a place known as the apothetae at Mount Taygetos and left to die.

Toddler training
Age 0-6
Early life for a Spartan boy set the stage for a harsh military-oriented future. By frequently being left alone in dark or unfamiliar places and being washed in wine, Spartans believed that their children would grow up much stronger than if they were given a traditional upbringing.

To the barracks
Age 7
At around seven years of age they would begin the first of three stages of the Spartan agoge. They became a paidion (a boy) and started their military career in earnest as part of a pack of young trainees guided by a teacher who would have been known as the paidionomos.

Martial arts
Age 10
Though Spartan boys were in training to fight, they were also taught the culture of Sparta and were encouraged to compete against each other in music and dancing, as well as more martial pursuits. At the very least, the Spartans recognised the value of rhythm in combat.

Bonding practice
Age 13
Once a Spartan boy finished his 12th year he became a meirakion (a youth) and his training became more rigorous. His exercise was ramped up and he fought barefoot and half-naked. It was around this age that he must bond with an older man – a ‘lover’ – from whom he could derive guidance.

SPARTAN SKILLS

Three dangerous disciplines all Spartan warriors learned

SPEAR

The spear, or 'dory' as it was known, was a Spartan soldier's primary weapon. It was around 2–2.7 metres long, held with one hand, while a shield was held in the other, had a leaf spear head at the business end and a spike on the butt. It took considerable training to use this weapon effectively, as the length and heavy wood the shaft was turned from made it unwieldy in the hands of anyone other than a highly skilled fighter.

Difficulty ●●●●●
Danger factor ●●●●●
Prestige ●●●●●
Usefulness ●●●●●

SWORD

The Spartan's xiphos was a close-range weapon of around 30–40 centimetres in length (shorter than the swords of other Greeks), razor-sharp and as quick as it was deadly in a Spartan warrior's hands. In the tight melee of the Spartan phalanx they were far more effective than the weapons of the enemy, penetrating shield walls and inflicting devastating wounds. Given the fervour the state instilled in its youth, it would not be surprising if some were killed or seriously injured while training with the dory, xiphos or the larger-bladed weapon, the kopis.

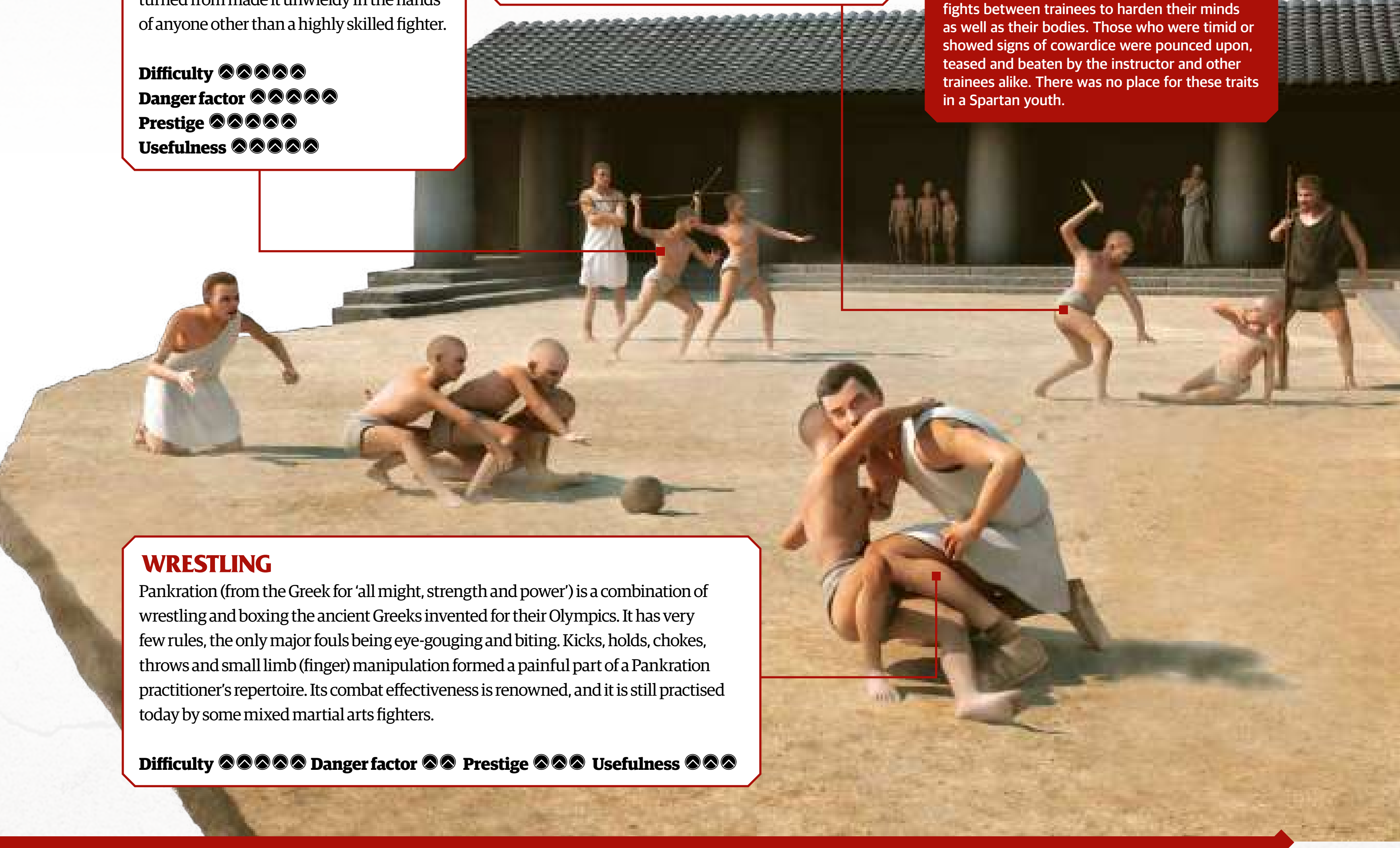
Difficulty ●●● **Danger factor** ●●●●
Prestige ●●●● **Usefulness** ●●●●●

TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Olympic gym meets military boot camp

As a part of Greece, Sparta incorporated many of the training techniques of their countrymen – some of which are still used by athletes today. The intensity of an exercise could be increased by hand weights or by making soldiers run on sand. Gentle walking as a low-intensity cool-down was reckoned to be beneficial to their recovery, and rest days were a vital part of their conditioning. But there were remarkably cruel aspects to their training too.

Alongside the ritualistic flaying, known as the 'diamastigosis', there was the 'hazing': instructors regularly whipped up rivalries and instigated fights between trainees to harden their minds as well as their bodies. Those who were timid or showed signs of cowardice were pounced upon, teased and beaten by the instructor and other trainees alike. There was no place for these traits in a Spartan youth.



WRESTLING

Pankration (from the Greek for 'all might, strength and power') is a combination of wrestling and boxing the ancient Greeks invented for their Olympics. It has very few rules, the only major fouls being eye-gouging and biting. Kicks, holds, chokes, throws and small limb (finger) manipulation formed a painful part of a Pankration practitioner's repertoire. Its combat effectiveness is renowned, and it is still practised today by some mixed martial arts fighters.

Difficulty ●●●●● **Danger factor** ●● **Prestige** ●●● **Usefulness** ●●●

Teenage trials
Age 13-18
During the five years leading up to adulthood, Spartan boys were fed a meagre diet in the belief it would make them tall and strong and prepare them for future military campaigns with little in the way of rations. They could steal food if they wanted more but were severely punished if caught.

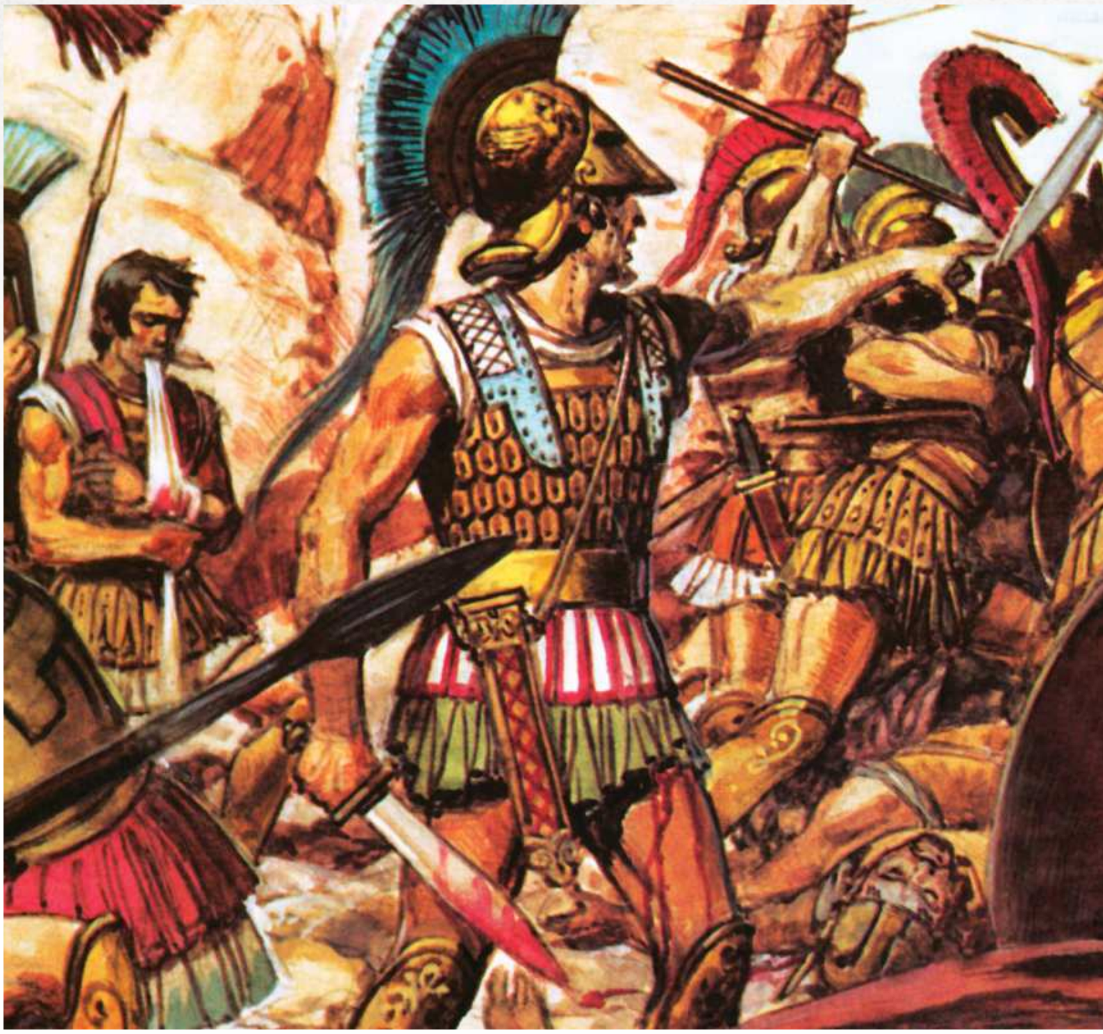
Passing on knowledge
Age 18
When a Spartan boy became an eiren (adult) he would spend his first year helping to train other youths at the barracks before moving to a mess with around 15 other, unmarried young Spartan soldiers. It was around this age he may have been sent on missions to kill unruly helots.

Secret service
Age 20-30
At some point after becoming a full member of the Spartan army but before their 30th birthday, a Spartan soldier was liable to two years in the krypteia, what was essentially the Spartan secret service. Part of their duties would have been to maintain control of helots in rural areas.

Getting the vote
Age 30
Spartan boys were only really allowed the full privileges of adulthood within their society after their twenties. They were now finally allowed to marry or talk to other Spartans in the marketplace. Also, they could now vote and be voted in to hold a post in office.

Retirement of a sort
Age 60
If a Spartan became a weak link for any reason, they could be retired from their current post on the front lines and given more menial duties. Older Spartan soldiers up to the age of around 60 were often sent to the rear for tasks such as guarding the baggage train on long campaigns.

flooded unbidden into his mind. At the age of 13, Aristodemus made the transition from paidion to a meirakion, or youth, and his life became tougher at every level. He was stripped of individuality, his head was shaved and he often went unclothed: a Spartan had no need for the trappings of weaker nations; being a Spartan soldier was dignified enough. He slept among his peers in a crowded dormitory on a bed of hard reeds, endured chilly winters and blistering summers and often returned bleeding and beaten from his exhausting daily martial routine. He didn't complain or so much as whimper; he considered himself lucky that a bloody mouth and cracked ribs were the extent of his injuries. The dummy spears and swords they trained with might have been wooden, but they were no mere toys. One of his fellow agelai, Procles, let his guard slip for just a second, enough for his sparring partner to exploit the opening and deliver a fatal blow to Procles' temple. There was no mourning - Procles was not cut out to be a Spartan soldier.



FACT OR FICTION: IS THIS SPARTA?

300 DEFENDED THERMOPYLAE

King Leonidas and 300 of his chosen Spartan warriors single-handedly held off a Persian army numbering over 100,000 at Thermopylae for three days, fighting to the last man before they succumbed.

VERDICT: FICTION

There were approximately 300 Spartans, but they were joined by thousands of other Greek soldiers from across the country.

WOMEN TRAINED TOO

Spartan women also had a rigorous training routine and competed in athletics and gymnastics against boys. It was believed it was important for women to be physically fit to bear children.

VERDICT: FACT

For the time, women were held in very high regard in Sparta.

EPHORS WERE EVIL

The ephors (elders) of Sparta were a group of powerful and lecherous old men who often left Spartan newborns to die and demanded great sums of money for their wisdom, which the kings of Sparta valued greatly.

VERDICT: FICTION

They were simply elders who held power and respect in Sparta.

> **"HE HANGED HIMSELF RATHER THAN FACE THE SHAME ARISTODEMUS EXPERIENCED ON HIS RETURN TO SPARTA"**

And now Aristodemus whispered a brief prayer to Apollo and Ares as he breached the Persian lines. The first Immortal he met didn't come close to living up to the title of his rank. Aristodemus used the momentum gained from his maniacal charge to plough his spear straight through his shield and pierce his throat. He didn't even attempt to retrieve his weapon from the Persian's body; the close range was ideally suited to his xiphos, a deceptively short sword that was deadly in the hands of a Spartan worth his salt. The next Persian to fall had foolishly exposed his flank.

Buzzing with adrenaline and a catharsis of emotion, Aristodemus re-enacted the memory of his first kill. This was not a soldier from an invading army, but a helot slave gathering fruit in a vineyard. Spartans would encourage their youths to steal to supplement their poor diet to make them stealthy and cunning. If they were caught, they were usually beaten or whipped: the punishment was not for stealing but for being caught. By the time he was approaching manhood, this trial had taken a darker path. Signs of resistance were rippling through the helot slave community, so the ephors used this opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. To nip any chance of revolt in the bud and to hone the blooming talent for violence their youths had begun to exhibit, the ephors gave Aristodemus and a handful of others some meagre rations, a xiphos and the simple order to go into the countryside, stalk and then kill a helot slave.

It took Aristodemus a day to choose his target and then wait until the big man

was alone and burdened with grapes. The attack was lightning quick and came from unexpected quarters: Aristodemus ambushed the helot the way he'd been taught, his xiphos cleaving deep into the man's groin three times, severing the femoral artery and barely giving him a chance to acknowledge his attacker, who fled before the helot collapsed.

It seemed the Persians were almost as unused to the savagely efficient way the Spartans could wield their weapons as the helots. This Immortal looked dumbstruck as Aristodemus' blade flashed three times in the sunlight, before his legs gave way as a torrent of blood gushed down onto the battlefield.

The Persian front line was done absorbing Aristodemus' suicidal charge, and now it was time for the lines to close and repel this wayward Spartan. In the ensuing melee, a cut he inflicted on a Persian's head blinded one of his opponents.

An eye for an eye. Now that felt more like redemption. Thermopylae had never been far from Aristodemus' mind this past year, but the memory of his disgrace now came back to him with the same vigour of his battle fury. Having survived two days at the narrow pass of the Hot Gates, Aristodemus' eye became infected, effectively blinding him. To King Leonidas, he was now a weak link and a liability to the effectiveness of his war machine. He was denied the honour of fighting for what would be the final, fateful day and was sent back to Sparta along with another unfortunate soldier, Eurytus, who suffered the same affliction.

Halfway home and realising what they would face upon returning alive and without the honour of victory, Eurytus decided to return to the Hot Gates and meet his fate. Aristodemus followed the orders of his king, however, and suffered a worse fate than his kinsmen at Thermopylae. He was snubbed, branded 'Aristodemus the coward', free Spartans could strike him in the street with impunity (though few dared to do so), while no man could offer him shelter. It would have been the lowest ebb for any Spartan, and yet, Aristodemus could still fight for Sparta - he could still redeem himself. Maybe it would be here, at the Battle of Plataea, with this final act of heroic abandon? Or if the black mark wasn't struck from his name, then his death would at least end the pain of his dishonour.

Aristodemus was one of only two survivors from the famous battle of Thermopylae. The other, who arrived too late at the final battle, hanged himself rather than face the shame Aristodemus experienced on his return to Sparta. This made Aristodemus the only veteran of Thermopylae to fight in the Battle of Plataea and goes some way to explaining why contemporary Greek historians picked him out.

The story of Aristodemus is the embodiment of the highs and lows of the Spartan way. From an early age they were forged into superhuman fighting machines through a merciless training regime and the denial of their most basic of human needs - whether that was a square meal or the love and attention of their parents.

Boys were broken down and taught to live by their wits, to rely only on other Spartan soldiers, especially their 'lovers' - the dubious title given to their adult guardians. Sparta has earned a legendary status today because it was pathologically willing to trade a normal life for its own sons in order to create an army that all of the ancient world would tremble before.

Aristodemus threw his life away at Plataea and his peers afforded him no special honour as a result. But Sparta recognised the fury and strength with which he had fought, the ferocity with which he cut down several Persians before falling himself. In the eyes of people, he had finally redeemed himself. Death was Aristodemus' salvation.

THREE GREAT VICTORIES

PLATAEA 479 BCE

Who did they fight? *Persia (Mardonius)*

Having retreated back into Persia, Xerxes left it to his general Mardonius to tackle the Greek city-state alliance. An 11-day stalemate culminated in a withdrawal by the Greeks to resupply. This was taken as a full retreat by Mardonius, which proved a fatal error. Spotting the enthusiastic – and reckless – Persian advance, the Spartans and other Greek armies halted their withdrawal and trapped a significant portion of the Persian infantry, routing them. The tide of the battle turned and the Persian invasion was repelled.

THERMOPYLAE 480 BCE

Who did they fight? *Persia (Xerxes I)*

Of course, the defeat of the Spartans at Thermopylae at the hands of the Persians is well documented. Around 4,000 other Greek soldiers along with 300 Spartans held the narrow pass of the Hot Gates before their position was compromised by the Persians and Leonidas decided to turn away all but his own men and around 1,000 other soldiers. However, their sacrifice bought time for the rest of the Greek forces to retreat and for the Greek cities to prepare for the invasion. It bolstered the morale of the other Greek states and ultimately contributed to Xerxes' army's own retreat back into Persia.

THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

431-404 BCE

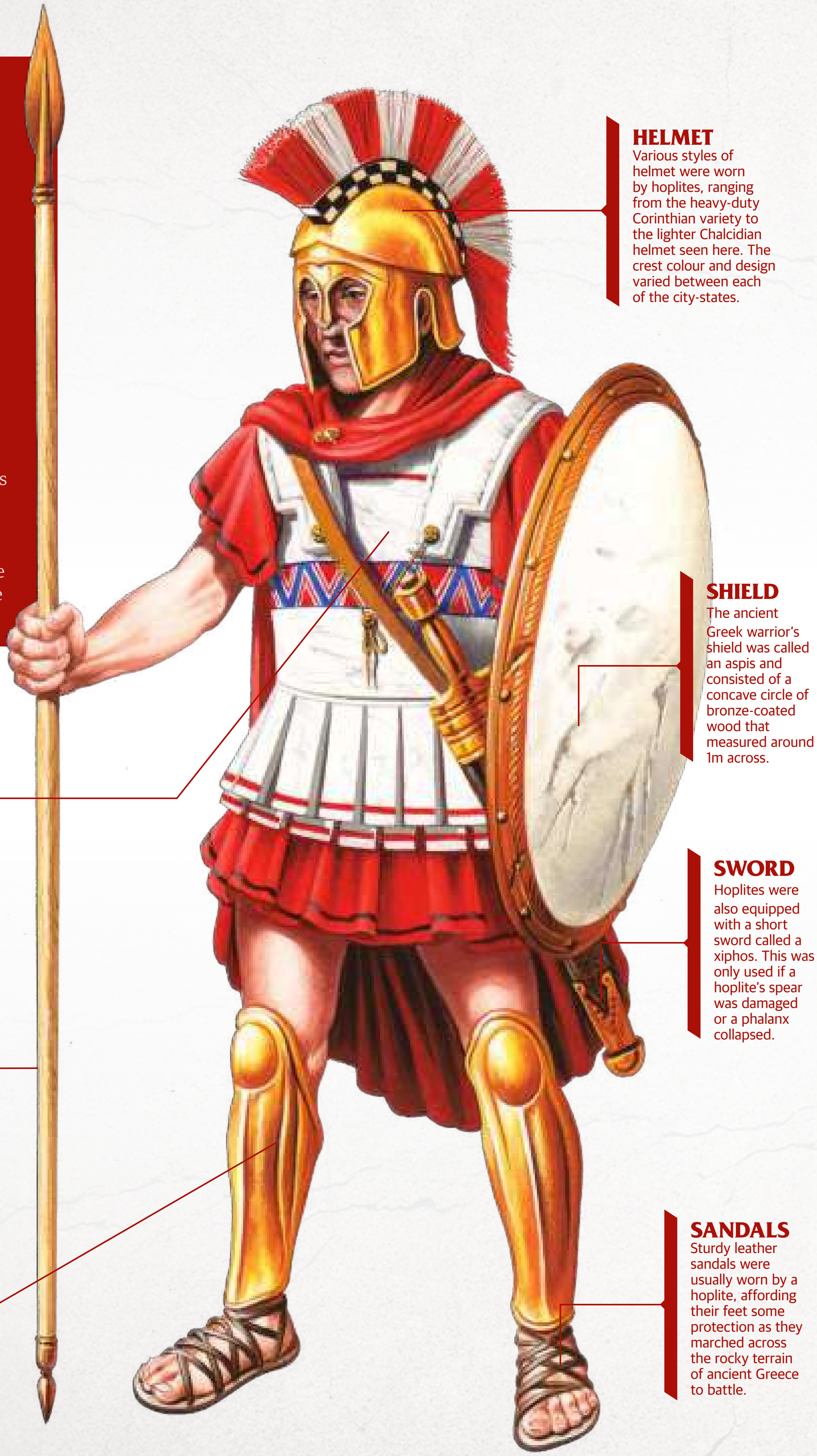
Who did they fight? *Athens*

Spanning nearly 30 years and punctuated by a brief truce, the culmination of this protracted war resulted in one of Sparta's greatest victories. Ironically, Sparta received some support from its old enemy, the Persians, as well as from its allies Corinth and Thebes, to make the final push on the powerful Athenian navy. Athens was crushed, the former major power in Greece reduced to a slave state while Sparta became, for a time at least, the leading light of the Greek city-states.

HOPLITE

Both in Homeric and post-Homeric Greece, hoplite warriors were considered some of the most deadly soldiers ever to take the field. Armed with an array of weapons including spears and swords and rigorously trained in the art of war over many years, hoplite armies often came to Greece's rescue.

Formed into a spiked phalanx, hoplites would fight together as one mobile unit, a formidable arrangement that helped them to score a number of unexpected victories, notably over the massive armies of the Persian Empire in 480 BCE.



HELMET
Various styles of helmet were worn by hoplites, ranging from the heavy-duty Corinthian variety to the lighter Chalcidian helmet seen here. The crest colour and design varied between each of the city-states.

BREASTPLATE
Both linen and metal breastplates were worn by hoplites, with the more affluent and influential troops often sporting ornate bronze armour. This soldier is wearing a linen linothorax.

SHIELD
The ancient Greek warrior's shield was called an aspis and consisted of a concave circle of bronze-coated wood that measured around 1m across.

SWORD
Hoplites were also equipped with a short sword called a xiphos. This was only used if a hoplite's spear was damaged or a phalanx collapsed.

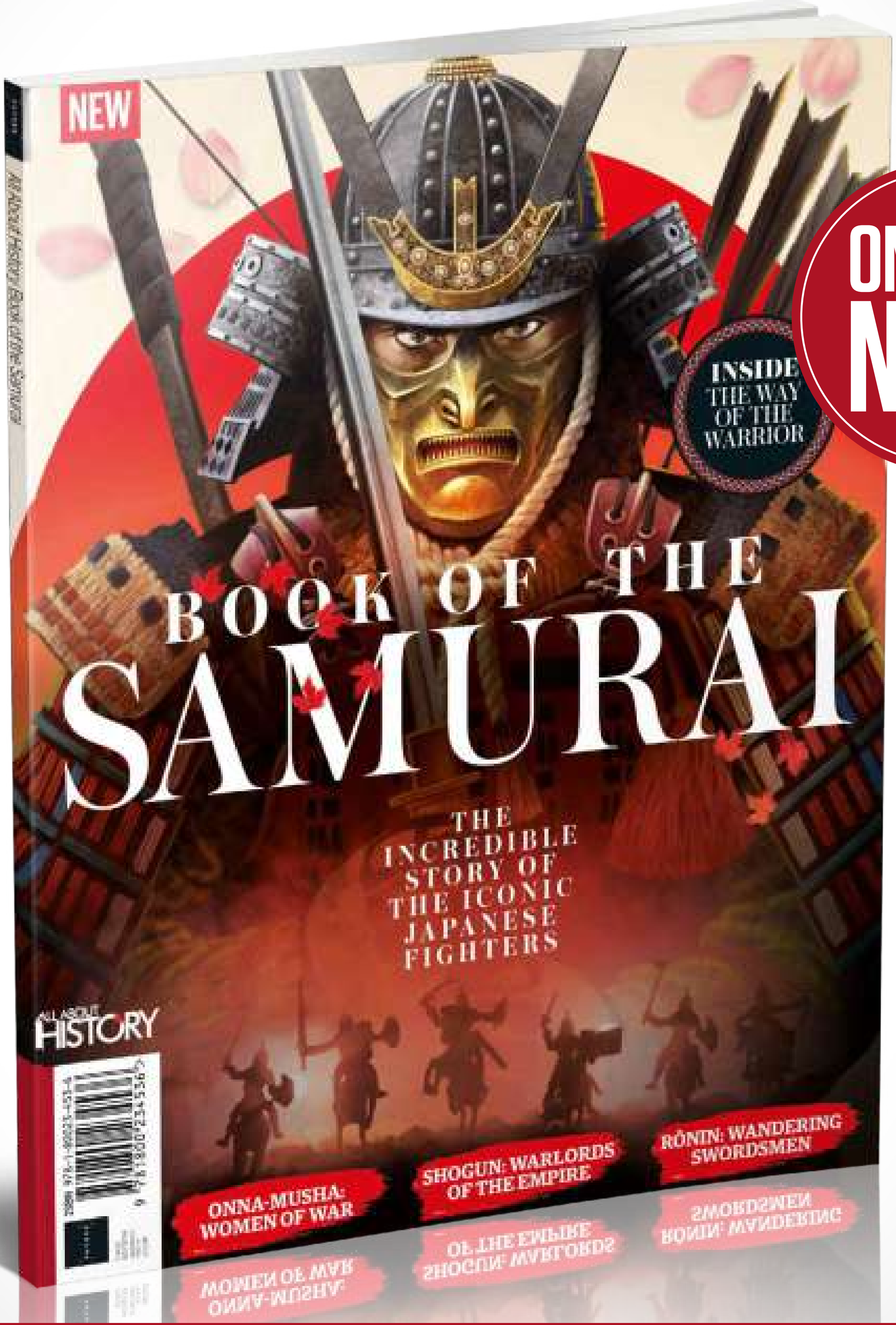
SPEAR
The primary weapon of choice for any hoplite soldier was a formidable 2.5m-long spear. This stabbing weapon would have been tipped with a leaf-shaped blade at the top and a shorter, stouter blade at the opposite end.

GREAVE
These metal sheaves were commonly worn to protect the leg from the knee down to the ankle. They were typically hammered out of iron or bronze sheets.

SANDALS
Sturdy leather sandals were usually worn by a hoplite, affording their feet some protection as they marched across the rocky terrain of ancient Greece to battle.

HONOUR. DISCIPLINE. INTEGRITY.

Explore the storied history of the samurai and learn what made them one of the world's most elite fighting forces. From humble beginnings, find out how this warrior class rose to become a major political power in Japan – and how, eventually, they would fall in the face of imperial reform. On the way, you'll discover their tactics, weapons, armour, and their bold etiquette of honour.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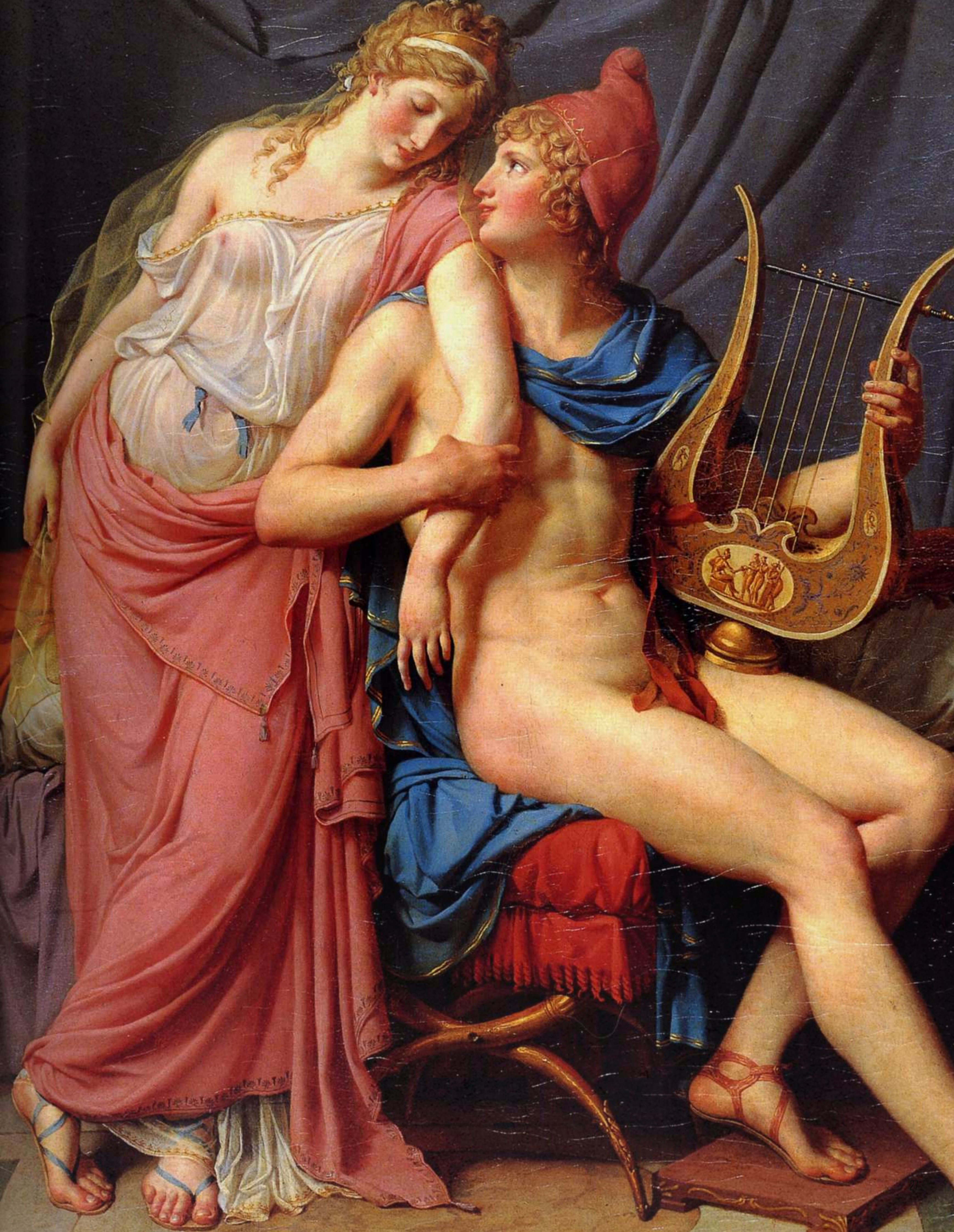
WOMEN OF SPARTA

UNCOVER THE TRUTH BEHIND THE WOMEN CONSIDERED SCANDALOUS BY THE REST OF ANCIENT GREECE

WORDS BY ◆ **KATHARINE MARSH**



BABIES. THE role of women in ancient Greece was to have them, raise them and make them great. In Sparta it was no different - the greatest thing a woman could do was marry and give birth to children who would grow up to defend their homeland. But this view seems to be an oversimplification; life for women in Sparta was considerably different, with more freedom and more responsibility. Having said that though, how much of this was just so that wives would produce sons?

Childhood is arguably the most important time in one's life - it's when we explore and shape our outlook ready for adulthood. In Athens children were separated, with boys receiving some form of education while girls were kept inside to learn how to run a household. It was the same all across ancient Greece, until you entered Sparta. Here children were side by side for the most part, battling through childhood and puberty in a way that was frowned upon by other societies.

Stories are told of weak and sickly baby Spartan boys being left on hillsides to die, but this was also a punishment inflicted on baby girls too. Gender didn't matter at this early stage, just that the child would grow up strong and healthy. This apparent equality was carried through into childhood.

Throughout the Greek city-states, girls didn't receive any formal education - they were confined to houses to learn how to run a household and be a good wife. In Sparta, life was different. Girls and boys were both afforded education, although the emphasis was slightly different for each.

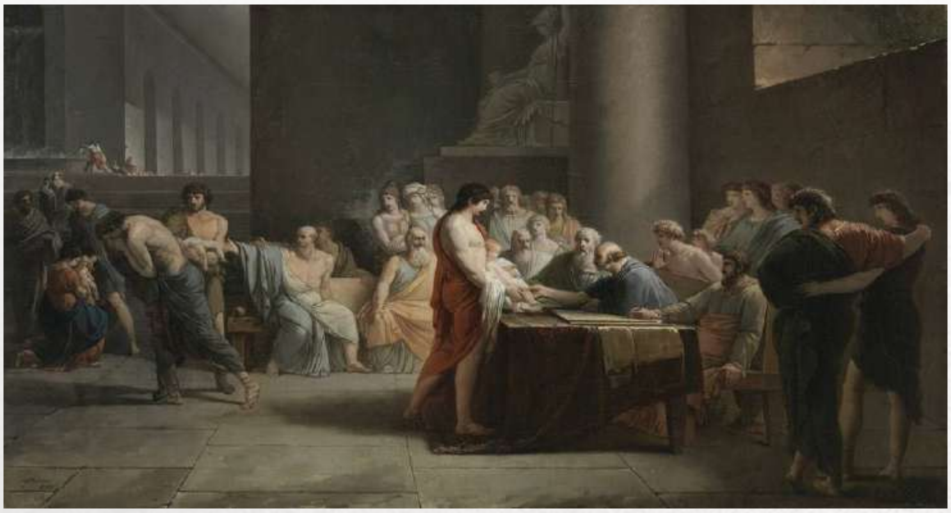
While boys were sent off to the agoge to learn the ways of war, girls were trained in gymnastics and mousike, a discipline that brought together music, dance and poetry. According to one historian it was "a pleasant relief from the self-control and austerity of everyday life," and it did go some way to showing the importance of women in Spartan culture. While they may not have been necessarily equal to the other half of the population, they were still held in relatively high esteem.

In fact, Gymnopaedia, the festival of naked youths, saw girls and boys participating in equal measure as they enthusiastically performed rhythmic dances. Intended to honour the god Apollo, the festival featured mixed choruses performing songs and poetry, something that was considered sacred in Spartan worship. Girls and women could lead these religious rites, and in the 7th century BCE the poet Alcman wrote of a female chorus leader that she "stands out as if among a herd of cows someone placed a firmly built horse with ringing hooves, a prize winner from winged dreams". Women weren't just accepted in these roles but were praised and encouraged. It was a far cry from life in Athens.

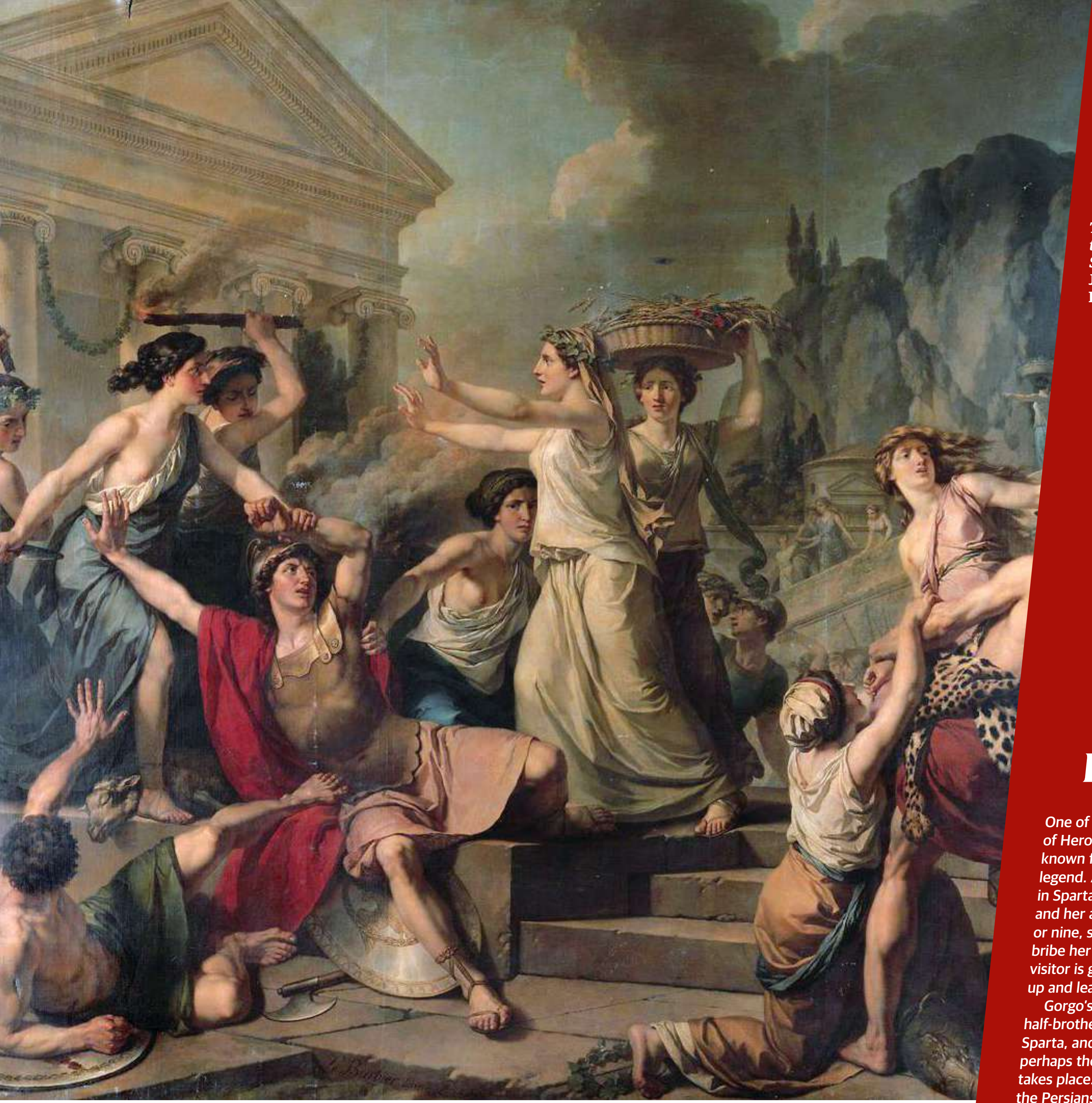
It didn't end there. Girls and boys regularly exercised together in minimal clothing - activity that was seen as scandalous in other city-states. According to Athenians, Corinthians, Thebans and everyone else, the sexes should be kept separate, only really coming together in marriage. Sparta put more emphasis on the state than the individual, with everyone pulling together to do their bit. For all children, regardless of gender, that meant becoming the best they could be and, most importantly, becoming strong members of society. For both girls and boys, it would be their strength that would see them through their adulthood.

Life as a young woman in Sparta certainly wasn't dull. Teenagers weren't locked away like those in the other city-states; instead they continued to enjoy relative freedom, exercising outside and - much to the consternation of outsiders - fraternising with men. To accommodate for the extra movement their robes had a long slit up the side. They were also known for their razor-sharp wit and were often outspoken instead of being meek and obedient. There's no doubt that this was the result of their upbringing, but their intelligence was important. As key as physical health was to a city-state full of soldiers, it's likely that intelligence was almost as high on the list of priorities. After all, only the best women could produce the best children, who would then become the best soldiers.

Women enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy. As able with horses and chariot riding as men, they were free to walk around the streets of Sparta, although make-up was strictly forbidden. That didn't really matter though, as Spartan women were apparently known for their natural beauty. There was



Children belonged to the state, not to their mothers



The Courage of the Women of Sparta by Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier

> **"LIFE FOR WOMEN IN SPARTA WAS CONSIDERABLY DIFFERENT, WITH MORE FREEDOM AND MORE RESPONSIBILITY"**

something else they were known for too - something almost entirely unheard of outside the territory of Sparta. Women could own land.

With men stuck in the army until the age of 60 (if they lived that long) either at war or staying at barracks, who was to look after their land? Who would tend to flocks and harvest crops? The burden fell on the daughters, wives and sisters left behind, with Aristotle even going so far as to say that two-thirds of Sparta "was in the hands of women". Of course, as an outsider he probably wrote this with some derision, but thanks to their education women were more than capable of being land-owners.

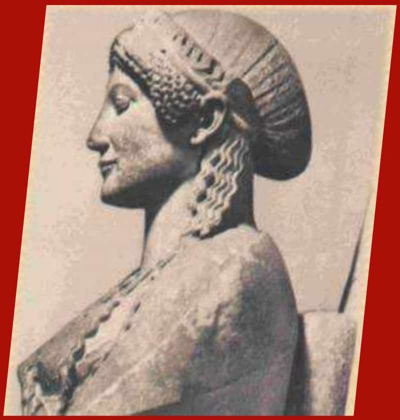
Furthermore, brothers and sisters inherited portions of family estates on equal merit, and women could even control and bequeath their own property as well as it forming a part of their dowry. It is worth noting, though, that this wasn't because Sparta was a progressive state by any stretch of the imagination - this was done purely out of practicality. After all, if the men fell in battle, who would remain to keep the city going?

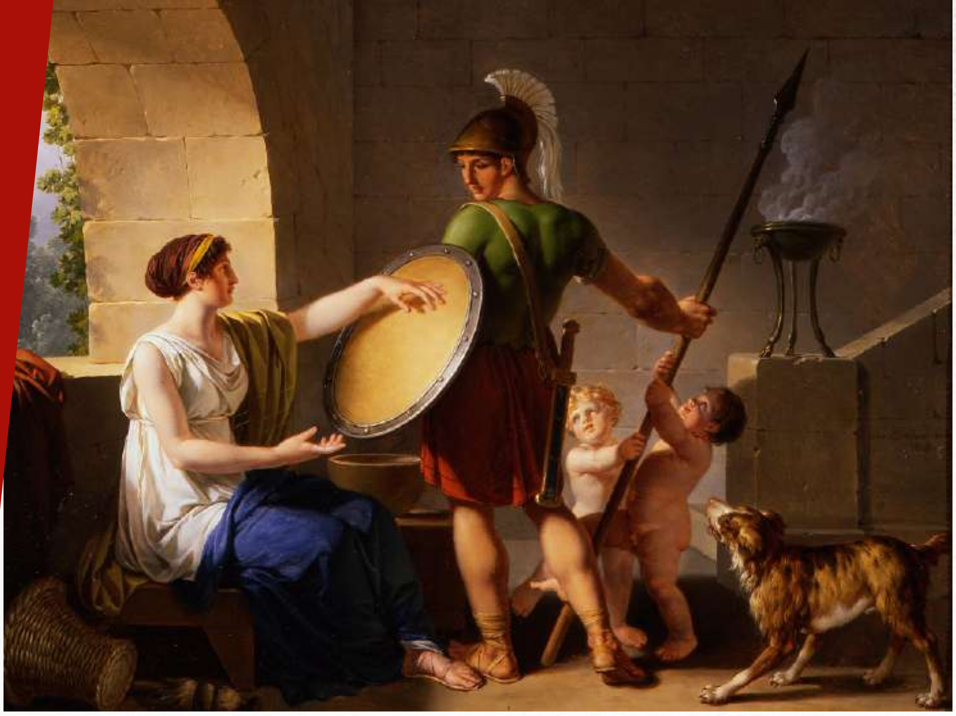
Yet regardless of these rights, Spartan women weren't raised to tend the land or to show off their intelligence. They were raised to marry and reproduce, and that was the end of

A WOMAN IN CHARGE

One of the only women to grace the pages of Herodotus' Histories, Queen Gorgo was known for her wisdom, and her life became legend. Afforded the same education as most in Sparta, she grew up confident in herself and her abilities. Apparently aged just eight or nine, she boldly called out a man trying to bribe her father by exclaiming, "Father, your visitor is going to corrupt you if you don't get up and leave."

Gorgo's marriage to Leonidas, her father's half-brother, saw her become queen of Sparta, and it was during this time that perhaps the most famous story told of her takes place. While Greece was at war with the Persians, a blank tablet arrived in the city-state, and no one could figure out what to do with it. But Gorgo had an idea, and she scraped off the wax to find a hidden message about the plan for a Persian invasion. Despite the idea coming from a woman, it was still carried out - and that one act possibly stopped a Persian takeover of the Greek peninsula. She was and still is considered to have been a strong, intelligent woman and a true testament of Spartan womanhood.





Mothers in ancient Sparta were hardened to losing their sons to a military life

it. Having said that, when it came to marriage, Spartans tended to wed much later than those living elsewhere. Men entered matrimony in their mid- to late-20s but only moved in with their wives when they reached 30 due to their military commitments, while women would stay single until their late teens or early 20s, rather than the Greek norm of when they displayed the first signs of menstruation.

These extra years afforded to women came with advantages, and there are no prizes for guessing why. The time was used to make women physically stronger, thus allowing them stronger children as a result. They wouldn't be forced to give birth while their bodies were still going through puberty - as Plutarch wrote, they were married "not when the women were small or immature, but when they were in their prime and fully ripe for it".

After marriage came the children. Sons were preferable - they would grow up to be the great defenders of the state, after all - but daughters were certainly nothing to be ashamed of. The most important thing was that healthy children were born, and lots of them.

Motherhood was very different in Sparta to today. Children weren't to be mollycoddled or even nurtured by parents but instead prepared for the realities of life. Mothers had seven years to mould their sons into the early stages of a warrior before they were given to the state and sent to the agoge. Girls would naturally be around longer, learning and exercising so that when their time came they would contribute their offspring to the constant war effort.

As boys grew up they were encouraged not to be craven, and even when they went off to battle, their mothers' parting words would usually be, "Come back either with your shield or on it." There was seemingly very little attachment - men who fled or returned from a lost battle were considered a disappointment. In fact, the families of deserters would be disgraced for generations. Meanwhile, the mothers of courageous and victorious soldiers were highly respected, and especially if their son had died for the state. One Spartan women, after hearing that her son had fallen on the battlefield, said, "Let the poor cowards be mourned, but with never a tear do I bury you, my son, who are mine, yea, and are Sparta's as well."

As far as we're aware there were only two reasons to receive a marked grave in ancient Sparta: if you fell on the battlefield or if you died in childbirth. Both were considered equal in giving your life for the service of the state.

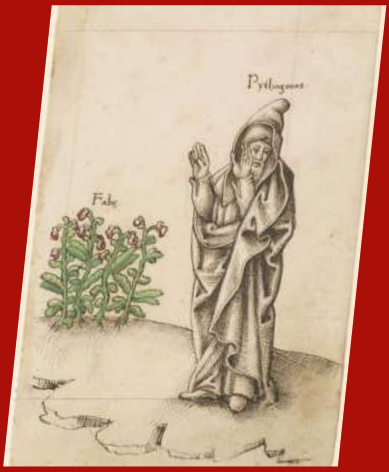
All of this paints the scene of an almost egalitarian society, where men and women were on an equal footing. But how equal can it really have been if one sex was only given all of these opportunities so that they could fulfil their one purpose of creating the next generation of soldiers? Having said that, you could argue that while Greek women elsewhere were growing up in more restrained environments, at least the Spartans were able to enjoy themselves a little before the inevitable. The notion of feminism or equality wasn't something that really existed in the ancient world, and certainly not as we know it today, and we'll never really know if women were happy with their treatment or if they yearned for something more.

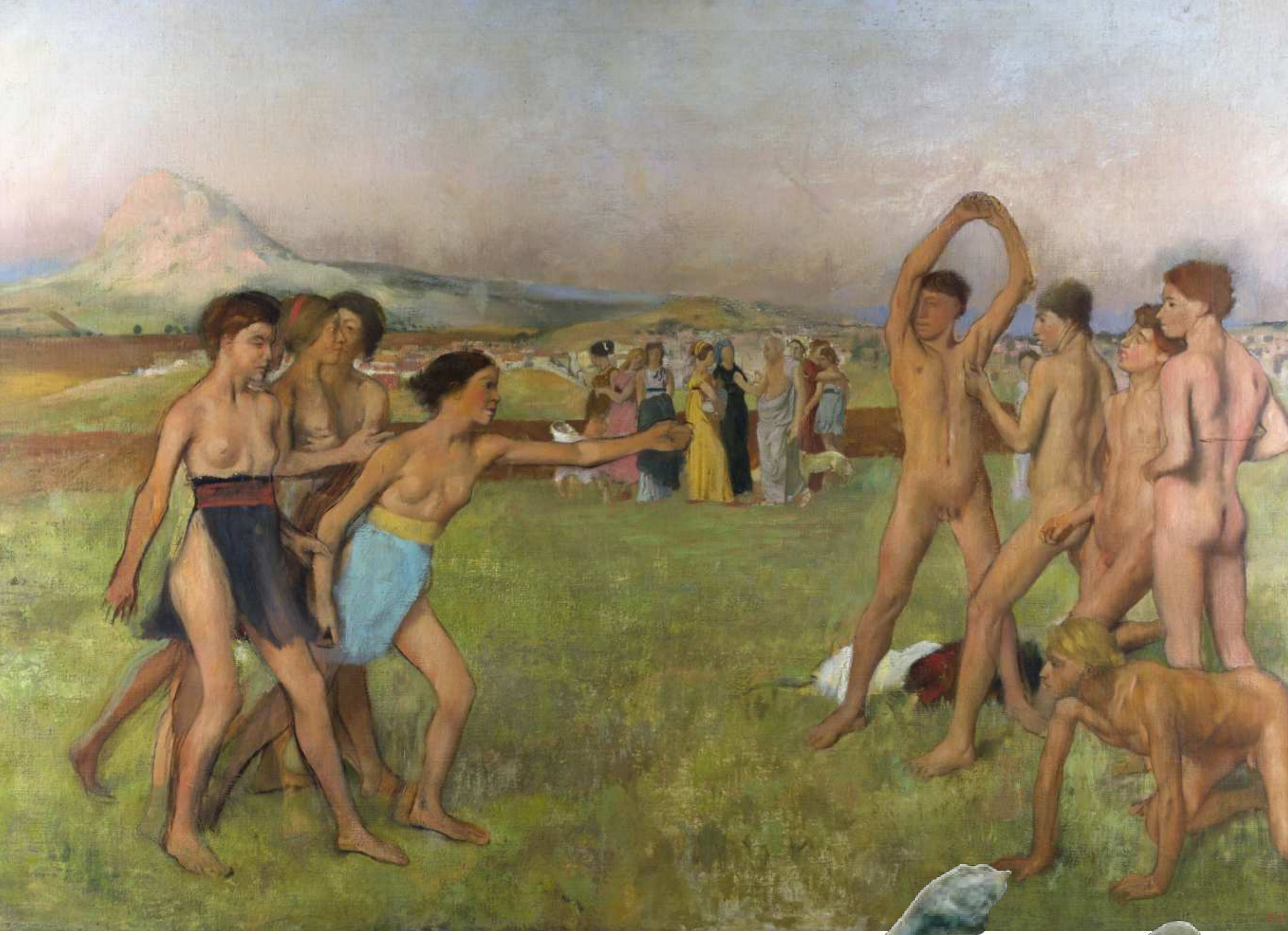
"WOMEN COULD EVEN BEQUEATH THEIR OWN PROPERTY AS WELL AS IT FORMING A PART OF THEIR DOWRY"

THE COURAGEOUS PHILOSOPHER

A philosopher by trade, Timycha wasn't one to run from a fight. A follower of the philosophy of Pythagoras, she and the friends she travelled with were strict vegetarians, and they didn't eat beans either. There are many theories as to how this last facet of the faith came about, but it was an important part.

When this band of travellers wronged Dionysius the Elder, he sent soldiers after them. They were all slaughtered - all but Timycha and her husband, Myllias, who were captured and brought to the ruler. His main interest was why they hadn't fled through the bean field, and when Timycha refused to divulge the secret of her religion she was tortured. Still she wouldn't tell, and she apparently bit her tongue off and spat it out at Dionysius' feet. While we don't know what happened to her next, it's most likely that she and Myllias were executed, but Timycha took her secret to the grave.





Nonetheless, it is worth noting that almost none of the information we have on life in Sparta and indeed Spartan women has actually come from the Spartans themselves. While it was a literate city-state – and even some women could read and write – almost all of what we know has come from the Athenians and writers from elsewhere in ancient Greece. With Spartans and Athenians being great enemies, historians have had to look behind the jibes and slander to uncover the truth about what life was really like, and they have managed to put together a fairly comprehensive picture, although there will probably always be holes that can't be filled.

But all this does beg one question: why was Sparta different? If almost all of ancient Greece kept women indoors, why did Sparta encourage theirs to fraternise with men, to exercise with them and treat them differently? The plan was for a strictly disciplined, collective society, and this was laid out by Lycurgus, a 7th-century-BCE lawmaker who oversaw the reorganisation of the polis. Rules for women were included in his reforms, and this was where their role in furthering Sparta's fearsome and powerful reputation came in. It was almost like a mantra – strong women produce strong children.

Some have suggested that geography played a role, and they may have a point. Athens was a port and saw a fair amount of trade, which in turn brought in influences from across the Mediterranean; the city was easily connected to the outside world, much like Corinth and Thebes. The citizens there enjoyed luxuries from all around the known world and heard tales of far-off places. Sparta, meanwhile, was secluded.

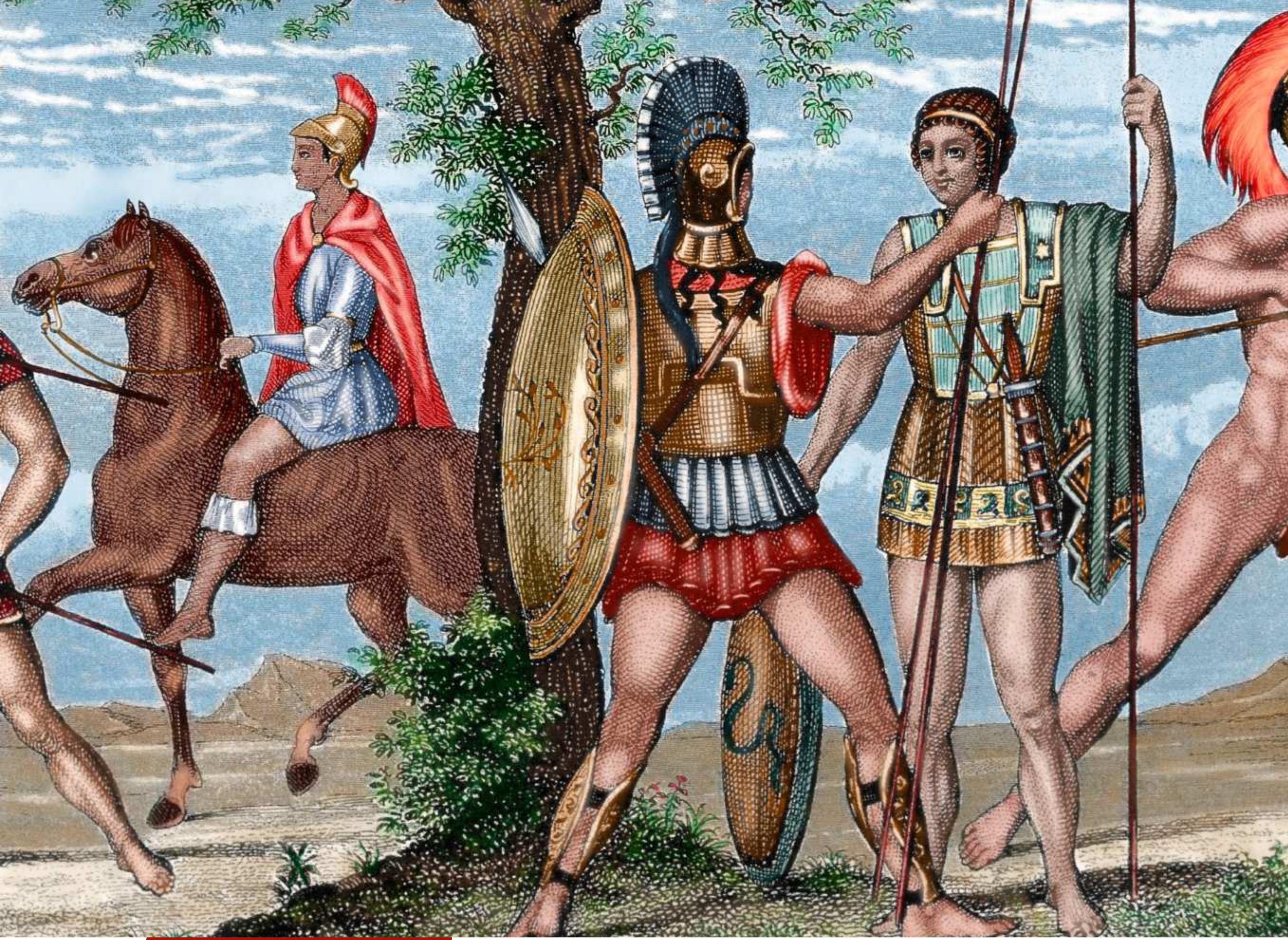
Surrounded by rugged mountains, it had to be self-sufficient to survive, and so its psyche was different. It wasn't enough for the men to be strong enough to defend it; everyone had to work together to create the threatening image that Sparta portrayed so that it would thrive. Women played a large role in that – they had to. Queen Gorgo was once apparently asked why Spartan women were the only women in Greece to exercise some control over their men, and Gorgo's reply was swift and true. "Because," she answered, "we are the only women who are mothers of men."

THE HELOTS OF SPARTA

◆

SPARTA'S WARRIOR SOCIETY DEPENDED ON SLAVE LABOUR – BUT SOMETIMES THE SLAVES RESISTED

WORDS BY • **EDOARDO ALBERT**



SO, YOU'RE part of a warrior society in which the role of the men is to fight and, when not actually fighting, to be training. All very well when it comes to defending Sparta or attacking rival city-states, but it leaves a small problem for the times when there isn't actually a war on: who is going to do the work? The hard, menial agricultural work to raise the crops to feed the warriors that lord it over Sparta.

Faced with this question, the Spartans looked around and saw the people whom they had defeated in the first place when conquering Laconia, the region in which they placed their capital, Sparta. These Laconians were the first slave labourers for the Spartan elite. The defeated and subjugated inhabitants of Laconia were joined in the later 8th century BCE by another conquered people, the Messenians, whose fertile land would be the breadbasket of Sparta throughout its history.

However, the conquest of Messenia caused as many problems as it solved for the Spartans, most notably the fact that the conquered populations now greatly outnumbered the Spartans themselves. The Spartans had, through conquest, acquired a large number of restive subjects all at once. Their response to the question of what to do with these conquered peoples formed – or deformed – Spartan society for the rest of its history.

Slavery was ubiquitous in the other Greek city-states. However, the status of the peoples whom the Spartans had conquered, who came to be called helots, was different than that of slaves elsewhere in Greece. Ordinary slaves were chattel, the property of individuals or families, with all the rights of a dog – that is, none whatsoever. Slaves were usually bought individually from slave traders, although men taken in war were often dispatched en masse to the most brutal slave employers – the mines. As chattel, the children of slaves belonged to their masters, not their own parents, and even manumitted slaves had to give a part of their earnings to their former master.

By contrast the helots occupied a distinctive position in the rigid social hierarchy of Sparta, their rank lying between free men and chattel slaves. Rather than belonging to an individual or a family, the helots were slaves to the state, held in bondage to Sparta and the Spartans rather than to any particular master. Indeed, the most likely derivation of the word 'helot' is from the root word for 'capture'. The helots were tied to the land and required to work it, providing the Spartan master to whom they had been assigned with a predetermined levy on what they grew and produced, although the helots were allowed to keep the surplus for themselves. Some helots also worked as domestic servants and in trade and as craftsmen, but the core role of helots in Spartan society was to provide the food the warriors needed to sustain themselves and to maintain their own social position. As peasants tied to the land the helots were at least able to live in family units largely of their own choosing, which separated them from chattel slaves, and since the land in Messenia was particularly fertile, helots could sometimes amass reasonable amounts of wealth. But with respect to wider Spartan society, this simply made the helots appear more threatening. For when faced with the problem of how to deal with the conquered populations among whom they lived, the Spartans had come up with a wholly new solution.

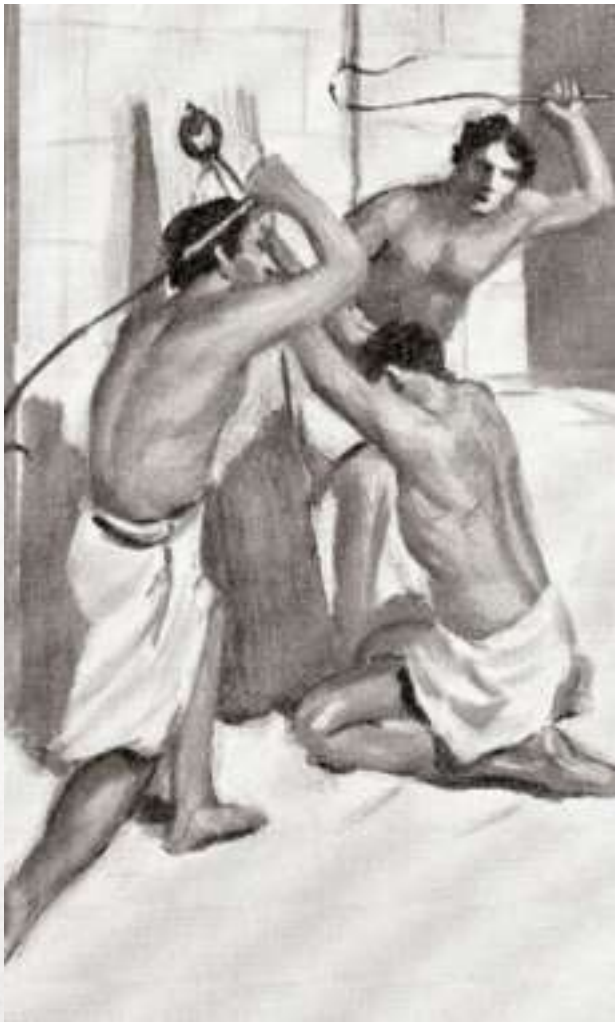
Not long after conquering the Messenians in the 7th century BCE, the subject helots had revolted against their masters. This Second Messenian War dragged on for decades; the Spartans' final victory probably owed something to their adoption of revolutionary new tactics: the hoplite formation. But in response to the trauma of this long war against their slaves, the Spartans, whose society had previously resembled that of the other Greek city-states with its own artistic and poetic traditions, decided to eschew such fancies.

Henceforth theirs would be a military state, trained and ready, always, for war. Young Spartans were subject to rigorous military training, the unfit were killed at birth or in early childhood and the Spartan system of homosexual pair-bonding between warriors intensified to a vicious degree the normal ties of fellow soldiers. The root-and-branch militarisation of Spartan society appears to have been in response to Spartan fears about the helots among whom they lived and who provided the labour that allowed the whole system to function. The underlying reason for this fear appears to have been one of simple numbers. Although demographic estimates of ancient populations are notoriously difficult to carry out accurately, all the ancient sources are unanimous in stating that the Spartans were greatly outnumbered by the helots, with Herodotus claiming that the helots outnumbered the Spartans by seven to one. Other estimates put the ratio lower, but what is clear is that, uniquely among the Greek city-states, there were fewer Spartans than helots - and the situation only worsened through the centuries as Spartan warriors were lost in wars and minor conflicts, while the helots increased in numbers.

This paranoia of being overwhelmed by the rising tide of helots informed every aspect of Spartan society. Each year a new council of five ephors took office to oversee the actions of the two kings of Sparta. As part of the ritual attached to installing the new ephors, the council would ceremonially redeclare war on the helots, allowing Spartans to kill any helots they wished to dispose of without fear of any consequences, either legal or divine. Indeed, the most important aspect of the ceremony was that part which declared the murder of helots as clean in the sight of the gods.

Although the source for this particular aspect of Spartan society comes from Plutarch in the 2nd century CE, for his part Plutarch gives his own source as a lost work by Aristotle, which makes the claim more plausible. The Spartans also instituted a spy force, the krypteia, and tasked it with patrolling the countryside and killing any helots who appeared to be dangerous - and by that the Spartans meant men who stood out from their fellows by reason of intelligence, initiative or bravery. It was a policy of beheading the helot leadership before it had a chance to form.

Living among a subject population, the Spartans themselves always went armed, and



HELOT REVOLTS

Despite a social system designed expressly for their subjugation, the helots fought back. In particular, those who lived in Messenia remembered their own independence and harked back to it. It had taken the Spartans nearly 20 years of hard fighting to conquer Messenia in the first place. The Second Messenian War started two generations later, around 685 BCE, and dragged on for almost two decades again. Despite their eventual defeat, many Messenian rebels were able to escape to Italy and elsewhere before the end of the war.

Determined never to allow another such revolt, the Spartans adopted their unique, militarised society. But even with a society devoted entirely to warfare and control, the helots rose again in 464 BCE, when a major earthquake devastated Sparta itself, leaving, according to the ancient sources, 20,000 dead. Although most modern scholars doubt the death toll was so high, the chaos following the earthquake gave the helots the opportunity and the time to rise against their masters.

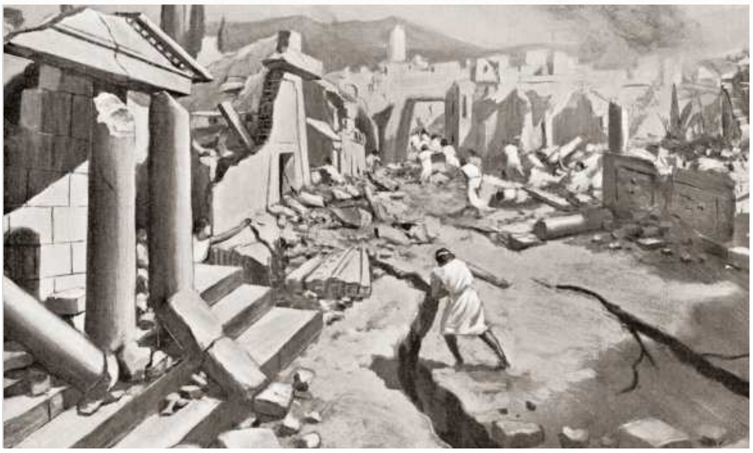
When the rebel helots made a stronghold on Mount Ithome, the Spartans were forced to ask for help from the Athenians to dislodge the rebels, although in the end the Spartans, fearing the Athenians would side with the helots, sent the Athenian army home. Unable to take the stronghold, the Spartans negotiated a settlement whereby the helot rebels could withdraw to Athens, where the Athenians settled them on the Corinthian Gulf.

at night they locked their homes. As well as acts of murder, the Spartans pursued a policy of ritual humiliation to ram home to the helots their lot as slaves to the state. They were required to wear clothing that marked out their status as slaves, and they were subject to public acts of ridicule, such as being made forcibly drunk and then led in front of the assembly so that it might mock their disorientated antics.

The treatment of the helots appears to have had a generally brutalising effect on the Spartans themselves, at least judging by the complaints of other Greeks about their behaviour. Ancient sources are replete with accounts of high-ranking Spartans, when negotiating with representatives of the other Greek city-states, treating men with contempt and sometimes even beating them with sticks. Such actions must have resulted from the habitual contempt with which the Spartans regarded the helots being transferred onto other non-Spartans.

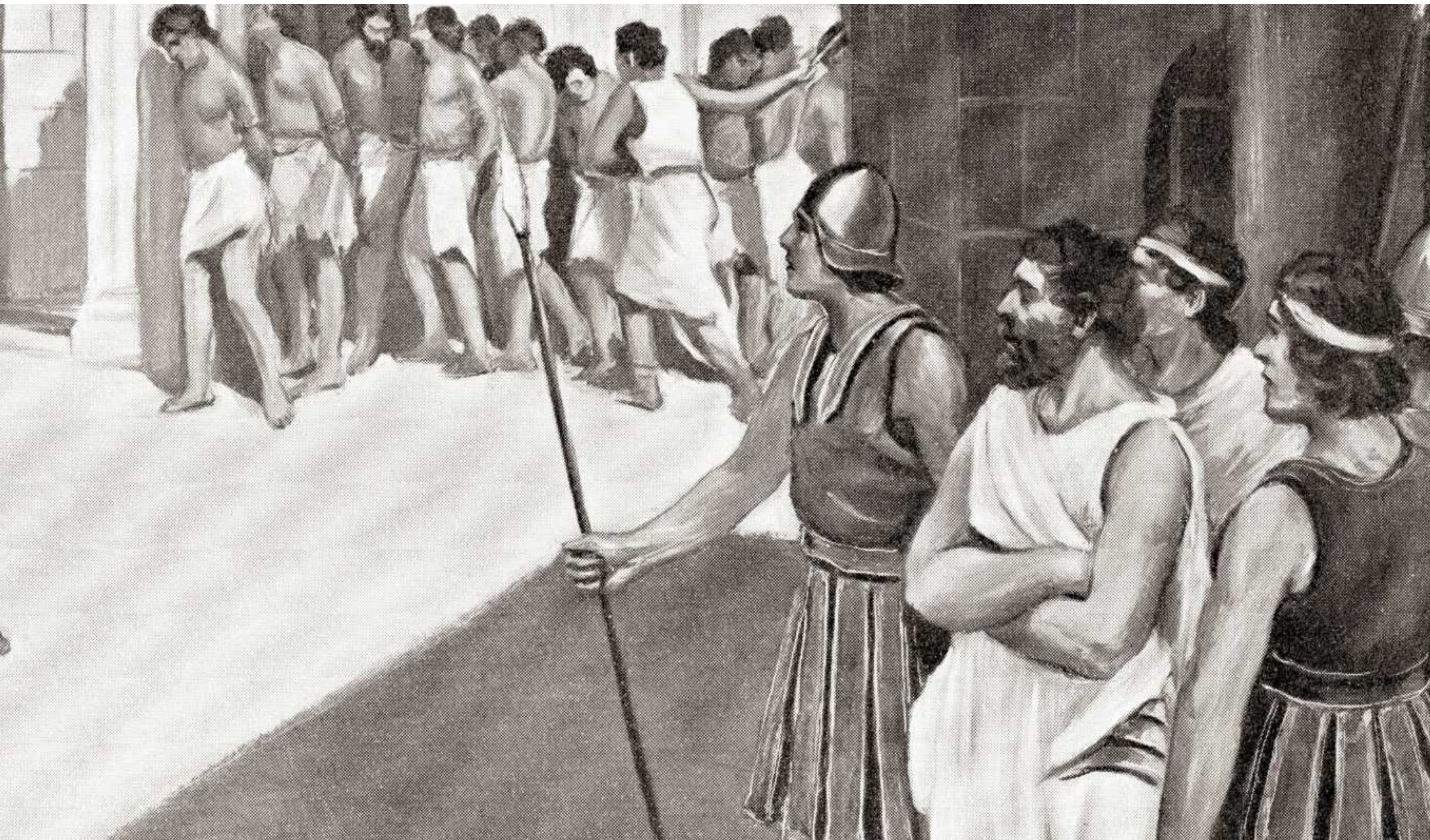
Fear of helot revolt was a major factor in Spartan politics too. Although the Spartan hoplites were the most feared among all Greek warriors, the Spartans were greatly wary of sending their army abroad - abroad meaning anywhere outside Sparta itself - for any length of time, lest the helots take the chance provided by the army's absence to rise against their masters. However, as the Spartan military suffered increasing losses in the interminable warfare among the city-states, the Spartans had little choice but to enlist helots into their army, although these seem to have largely come from the Laconian helots - the Messenian helots remained hostile to their Spartan masters. Indeed, such was the place of helots in the later Spartan army that each hoplite was accompanied into battle by seven helot auxiliaries.

The Messenian helots remained subject to their Spartan masters until 370 BCE, when the Theban general Epaminondas conquered Messenia from Sparta, having previously inflicted a disastrous defeat upon the Spartan army at the Battle of Leuctra, the first occasion in which a full-strength Spartan army had been defeated by a rival. However, the Laconian helots remained under Spartan mastery until the second century BCE, when reformist kings finally emancipated them. By that time the Laconian helots had been a subject people for more than 500 years. Throughout all of those centuries the helots of Laconia and Messenia had been both the foundation of the Spartan state and its greatest fear. It was an uncomfortable position for all parties.



A citizen staggers through a ruined Sparta in the aftermath of the 464 BCE earthquake

Below: Helots were regularly beaten just to remind them of their place



RELIGION

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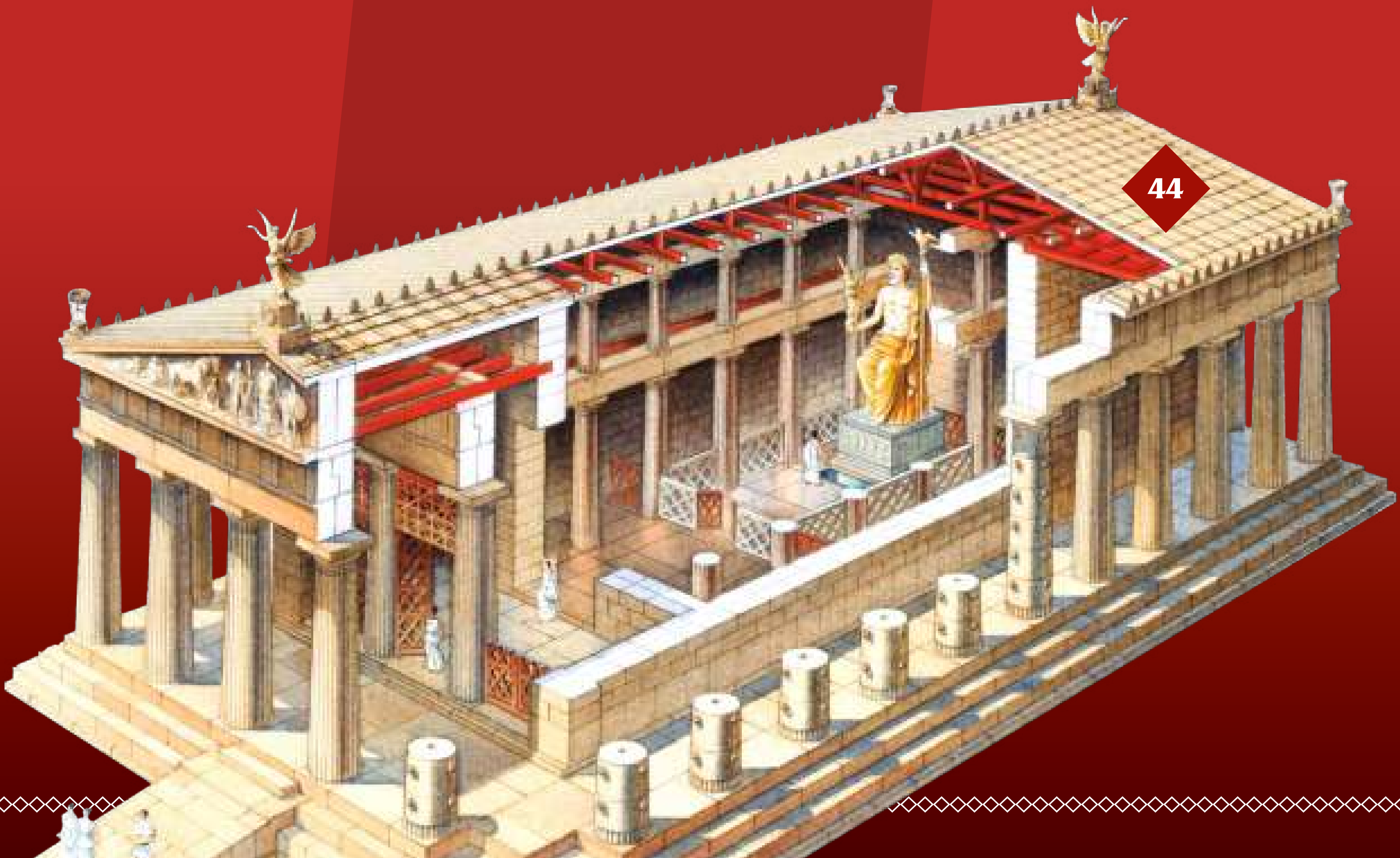

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THE GREEKS AND THEIR RELIGION

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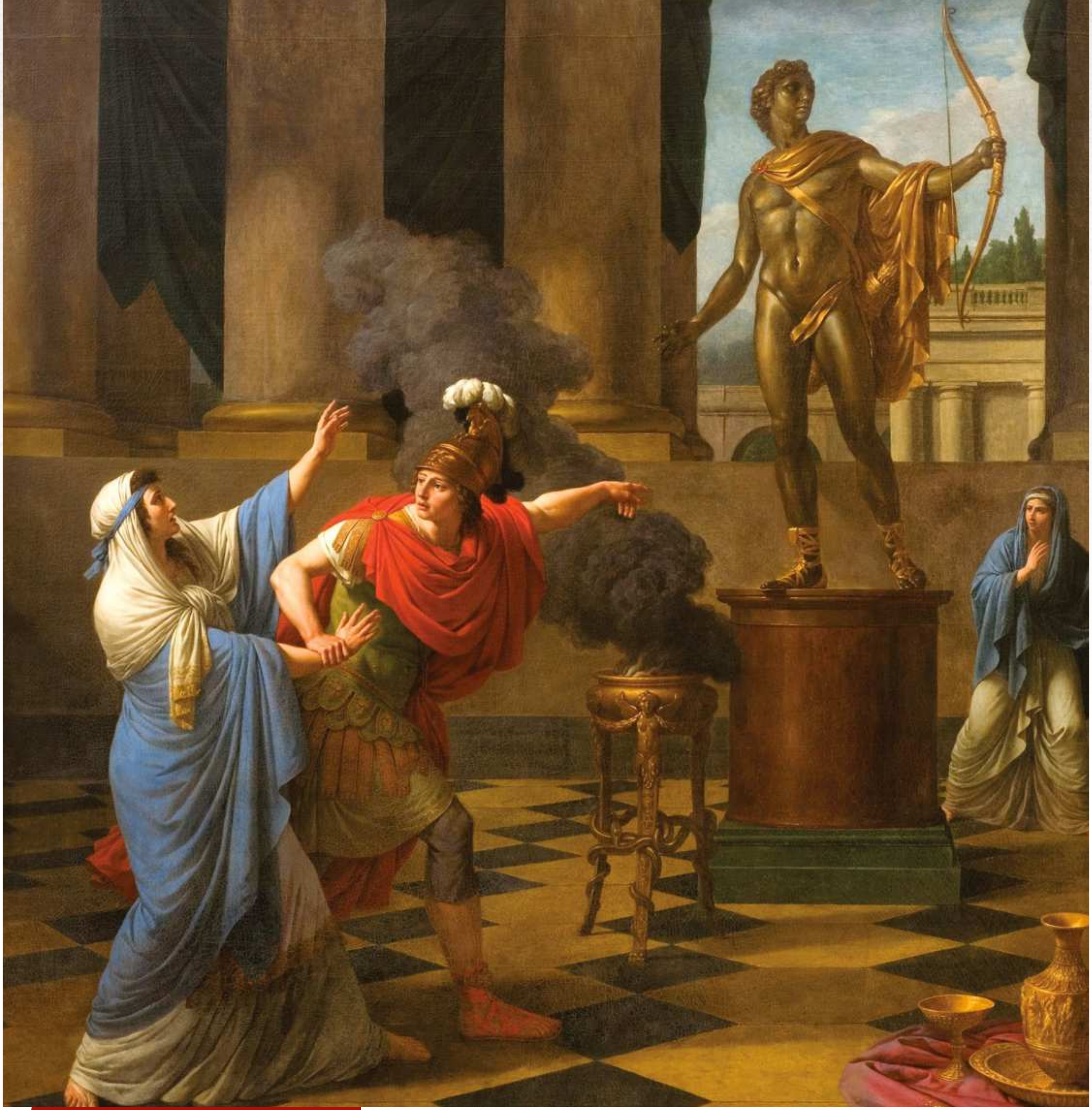
ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION WAS DIVERSE, CONTRADICTORY, AND ENDLESSLY INVENTIVE, MUCH LIKE THE GREEKS THEMSELVES



GREEK RELIGION had no formal set of beliefs or practices to which all had to conform or accept. The Greeks had their mythological stories, many of which were shared all over their country, but they did not develop a rigorous system of beliefs about them. The Greeks, for example, had no one sacred text, such as the Bible, at the core of their religion. Often Greek myths differed from place to place, as well as the particular stories told about the gods and heroes.

Sometimes these stories were wildly contradictory of others – for instance, several gods had clearly overlapping areas of authority that could not be reconciled. Greek mythology was the product of centuries of unregulated storytelling by some of history's most creative and innovative people. Their myths explained the origins of the gods, the nature of the world in which the Greeks lived, and what they believed to be their history. If their mythology might appear to be lacking coherence at times, that is a modern judgement that would have puzzled the Greeks themselves.

Furthermore, unlike the case in modern times, the ancient Greeks lacked a concept of a clear division between the realm of religion and that of non-religious life. For them, it was a seamless whole, with the gods, of which there were many, demanding and receiving the worship and sacrifice delivered by both the state and private individuals regularly.

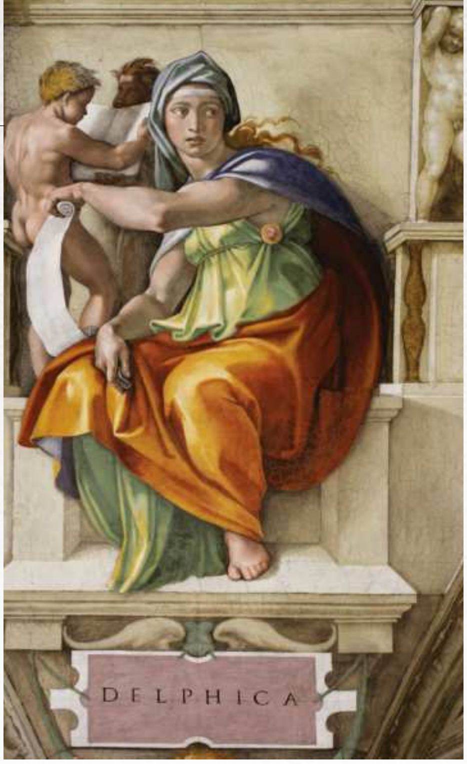
In fact, the Greeks had no specific word for 'religion' as we might understand it; religion was simply part of their everyday life. Rituals were conducted at all important public and private events, and a deity was routinely consulted before any major undertaking.

THE OLYMPIC GAMES

One festival that was attended by Greeks of all the cities was the Olympia in honour of Zeus Olympios (of Mount Olympus). First recorded as taking place in 776 BCE at Olympia, the Olympic Games were held every four years and only Greeks were allowed to attend them. The games initially involved just one event, a foot race, but over time, several other competitions were added to the programme.

Though it was an athletic competition, the religious nature of the festival was always present. The Olympia began with sacrifices and prayers offered to Zeus. Next, all of the competitors swore an oath before Zeus' altar and statue – breaking it could result in a stiff fine or disqualification. There were then two further public sacrifices, with one conducted on the day of the full moon and the second on the final day of the festival.

While the games were being held, all of the states of Greece were bound to observe an armistice. This sacred truce was implemented so that competitors and others who travelled to watch the games could attend them without fear of harm befalling them.



The oracle of Apollo at Delphi, as imagined by Michelangelo

A fortunate result in one's life was often responded to with a votive offering to a god, vows of thanks, or some other public form of recognition of the particular deity to whom success was owed.

There were 12 major gods and goddesses of the Greeks. These were the Olympians, so named because they resided atop Mount Olympus. Zeus was the lord and master of them all; Hera, his wife (and sister) was his queen. With him also was Aphrodite, goddess of love, bright Apollo, and Apollo's virgin sister Artemis the Huntress. Demeter, goddess of growing things, was there, along with Athena, the goddess of wisdom and patroness of heroes. Hephaestus too was an Olympian; he was the lame but matchless smith of the gods. Hermes was Zeus' fleet-footed messenger. Brutal Ares was the lord of war, while Poseidon was the god of the sea and its creatures. Rounding out the Olympian pantheon was Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry.

In addition to the mighty Olympians, the Greeks had hundreds of other lesser deities. Having so many gods of their own meant they were relatively open-minded when it came to the gods of non-Greeks; they readily identified or equated foreign gods with similar ones in their own pantheon. They had no cause to deny the existence of anyone else's gods, and their easy-going attitude in this regard certainly didn't mean the Greeks were unserious about religion. In fact, treaties between city-states were solemnised by oaths sworn by the gods as well as sacrifices – breaking such a treaty might bring about a terrible disaster.

The gods of the Greeks had their own priests and priestesses who oversaw the rites performed in honour of the gods and tended their temples, shrines and sanctuaries. They did not involve themselves with the spiritual concerns of the worshippers. But while there was little in the way of formal doctrine for priests to know or follow, there were several features to worship that all of the Greeks did have in common.

Prayers were the usual means by which people communicated with the gods. The primary parts of a prayer were the invocation, in which the person called upon the deity using his name, title and abode; the argument, in which the supplicant gave reasons to the god as to why he should help, which might include a recitation of good deeds performed by the mortal or making a note that the god was known for his helpfulness; and the prayer itself, which was a request for some kind of divine aid. Many kinds of relief might be sought, such as an end to sickness or drought.

The cleansing of the community from pollution (or miasma) was of enormous importance to the Greeks. Private individuals might be purified by washing, and purification was often undertaken before some important action or perhaps as required by the calendar. The Athenian Assembly underwent ritual purification before the beginning of a meeting by having a sacrificed piglet carried around the members. Sometimes a community might even undergo a mass purification driving out human scapegoats.

Ritual purification could be effected by washing or sprinkling. Fumigation was also used, along with seawater and water drawn from sacred springs. Sacrifices would also suffice for purification, with the blood of the victim used to wash away the pollution of an unclean person.

Indeed, sacrifices were of vast importance in Greek worship. Both animals and vegetables were seen as appropriate sacrifices to the gods. With the former, the victim was brought to the altar of a god in a procession where it was sprinkled with water. These drops caused the animal to nod, which to the Greek mind was its acceptance of its sacrifice. Hair was then cut from the animal and a prayer was said to indicate what the sacrificer wished for. The animal was dispatched via a cut to the throat and its meat divided out into portions. The first was for the god. The second, the entrails, were roasted and eaten by the participants of the sacrifice. The rest of the meat was then boiled and given out to those present at the ritual.

Festivals were a significant part of Greek public religion. Hundreds of public religious festivals were held every year by the various communities of ancient Greece, and about one in every three days of the year was devoted to a festival of one kind or another. Though particular practices and the deities most prominently honoured might vary from city to city, religion was a central element that served to distinguish Greeks from foreigners.

The basic features of a festival were the procession, the sacrifice and the feast - outside of these, local traditions could differ widely. Most festivals owed their origins to agricultural rituals carried out to ensure a bountiful harvest, and they typically took place seasonally; for example, the Thesmophoria, which was held in honour of Demeter, mostly happened in the autumn.

Athens was particularly fond of festivals, and was said to have held twice as many as any other city in Greece. One of these annual events was the Great Dionysia. Plays formed an important part of this festival, with four days devoted to them - three for tragedies and the fourth and last was reserved for comedies.

As might be imagined, with sickness and death ever-present in ancient times, the Greeks were often very anxious about the future. The reasonable desire for reassurance led many to seek out advice from the gods, which was obtained through their oracles. There were ten such oracles who foretold the future, after a fashion, for mortal men. Foremost among these was the oracle of Delphi, where the Pythia, a priestess of Apollo, delivered her pronouncements on behalf of the god. In words attributed to Apollo himself, the very purpose of the construction of his temple there was so that he could give "unfailing advice through prophetic responses" in it. Another famous oracular shrine was that of Zeus found at Dodona in Epirus. Questions put to the god's oracle were often very personal, such as whether the supplicant should get married or make a voyage across the sea. The response was usually simply yes or no.

However, sometimes the answers could be more complicated and have major consequences on the Greek world. Right before the mighty Persians invaded Greece for a second time in 480 BCE, the Athenians consulted the oracle at Delphi. They knew that their situation was dire, and some were even considering packing up and leaving for safety in Italy. The ancient historian Herodotus tells us that the priestess Aristonice told them that "only the wooden wall shall not fall". This baffling response was open to many interpretations, but Themistocles, the leading man at Athens, cleverly interpreted this to mean that they would have to rely on their navy, the ships themselves being made of wood, to fend off the advancing Persians. The Athenians would go on to lead the combined Greek fleet to a great naval victory at Salamis soon afterwards.

CROSSING OVER

The Greeks believed that the dead needed help in crossing the boundary between the world of the living and Hades, the gloomy realm of the dead. Those left behind sought to bury the deceased as quickly as they could, or else the unburied bodies would be condemned to roam for many years along the banks of the Styx, the river that marked the boundary between them and Hades.

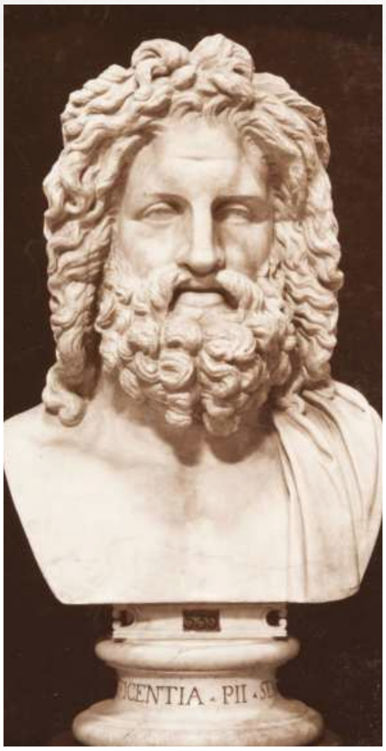
The retrieval of the bodies of the dead and their proper burial was of tremendous importance to the living. In 405 BCE, ten Athenian admirals won a great naval victory at Arginusae but failed to collect the corpses of their slain sailors on account of a storm that came up suddenly. On their return to Athens they were put on trial for dereliction of duty despite having won the battle - several of the admirals were executed as a result.

Within days of death, the body was to be buried, with the corpse being carried to the place of burial. Both bodily burial and cremation were available, with the latter thought to be more prestigious. The ashes were placed in an urn, which was itself then buried. Most Athenian burials took place on the roads leading out of the city; they weren't allowed inside the city because of a wish to avoid pollution by the dead. After interment, the graves were not forgotten, but were tended to regularly by the surviving relatives, especially by the women of the family.

The Parthenon was the great temple of Athena in Athens

THE TWELVE OLYMPIANS

THE GODS OF OLYMPUS WERE A FRACTIOUS FAMILY OF GLORIOUS, MAJESTIC, SCHEMING AND TREACHEROUS DEITIES



ZEUS

Lord of Olympus

Mighty Zeus was the lord and king of the Olympian gods and father of many gods and heroes. His domain was the sky and he was master of the weather. His animal was the eagle, the greatest of all birds. Zeus was the most powerful of all the gods, perhaps stronger than all of them put together. Yet he was not invincible, and he could not defy the wishes of his divine brethren with impunity.

Zeus oversaw oaths and hospitality. His divine radiance was enough to burn mere mortals to ashes. He also had a roving eye and would have many amorous trysts with nymphs and other women who were not his wife. Through Danae he would father the hero Perseus, slayer of serpent-crowned Medusa; Heracles, destined to become a demigod on Olympus; and Helen, the most beautiful woman of all. Zeus had many other dalliances besides the ones that produced such mighty children, and Hera, his wife, would seek vengeance for her humiliation by afflicting them.

ATHENA

Goddess of wisdom and war

Athena, goddess of wisdom, was the daughter of Zeus by the goddess Metis. The bright goddess was the deity of civilisation. Athena was a patroness of many Greek heroes. In the *Iliad*, we find her siding with the Greeks against the Trojans during their ten-year war, in which she intervened directly to help them. One significant form of assistance came at the beginning of the *Iliad*; we find her restraining the warrior Achilles from killing Agamemnon. In the *Odyssey*, we see Athena helping another favourite, Odysseus, make his way from Troy to Ithaca.

Athena was the patron deity of Athens, the greatest of all Greek cities. In the 5th century BCE the Athenians would build the Parthenon, the most magnificent of all temples dedicated to her.

Athena was noble in aspect and demeanour but could be harsh to those who displeased her. Tiresias had the misfortune to espy her while she bathed, and she struck the poor man blind for his transgression.

APHRODITE

Goddess of love

Aphrodite was the goddess of love and beauty. She was born out of the sea foam when Cronus tossed the severed genitals of Uranus into the waves, though another myth gives her a less gruesome birth and makes her the daughter of Zeus and the goddess Dione. Her major cult centre was Cyprus, where she is said to have been born.

Oddly, the loveliest of goddesses was married to the ugliest of gods, Hephaestus the lame smith of Olympus. She was not faithful to him and was once caught naked in bed with Ares, the god of war, by a magic net fashioned by her cuckolded and outraged husband.

Aphrodite figured prominently in the start of the Trojan War. When she, Hera and Athena each sought to claim the title of most beautiful, they had Paris, the son of the king of Troy, choose between them. Hera offered him power, Athena promised victory, but Aphrodite told him that she would make the most beautiful woman in the world his own...

HERA

Queen of the gods

Glorious Hera was both the wife and sister of Zeus and queen of the gods. Her purview was marriage and motherhood. Despite her position as wife to Zeus, she was hardly the happiest of wives. Her husband's philandering ways made her extremely jealous. She evidenced a particular hatred for Heracles, Zeus' son by the mortal woman Alcmene. Hera constantly sought to avenge her humiliation by Zeus by afflicting his son Heracles, who had done her no harm. She despatched snakes to kill the boy when he was but an infant, but her murderous plan was thwarted when little Heracles killed them both. She later made him go mad, and while he was insane he killed his wife and children.

Hera could also be murderously jealous of Zeus' lovers. She persuaded Semele, the mother of the god Dionysus, to insist that Zeus appear to her in his full divine splendour. Reluctantly, he did as he was asked, and the poor woman was reduced to ash by his overpowering radiance.

HERMES

Messenger of the gods

Son of Zeus by the nymph Maia, Hermes was the god of messengers and travellers. He acted to guide others to their destinations. In the *Iliad* he brings King Priam of Troy through the Greek lines to meet with Achilles to recover the body of his slain son, Hector. When Hera, Athena and Aphrodite needed to find their way to Mount Ida to participate in the Judgment of Paris, it was Hermes who led them there. It was Hermes too who conducted Persephone out of the Underworld of Hades back to her mother Demeter in the world of the living.

POSEIDON

Lord of the sea

Poseidon was the full brother of Zeus and son of Cronus. When the three brothers Zeus, Poseidon and Hades overthrew their father, Poseidon took the sea as his realm. Like the sea, Poseidon could be placid one moment and raging the next. His weapon and symbol of authority was the three-pronged trident. The vengeful Poseidon ensured that the Greek hero Odysseus would be delayed for years in returning to his home island of Ithaca for his blinding of the sea god's son, the Cyclops. He was responsible for earthquakes, and he was known as 'Earth-shaker' among Greeks.

DEMETER

The goddess of growing things

Demeter was the goddess of the earth, motherhood, fertility and the harvest. As the ultimate source of the grain that the Greeks used to make their bread, she was enormously important to them. Her main festival was the Thesmophoria, held every autumn to ensure a good harvest.

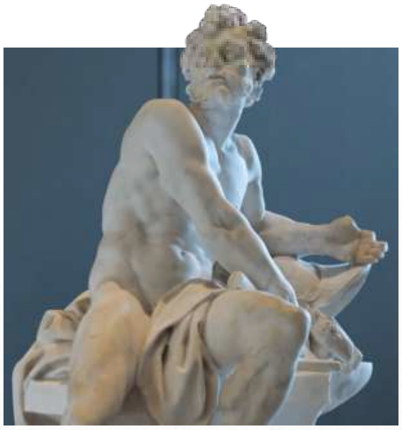
Demeter figures prominently in the explanation for the seasons, and thus the annual cycles of birth, life, death and rebirth seen in the natural world. The story begins when Hades, lord of the Underworld kingdom that also bore his name, stole the goddess' daughter Persephone.

ARES

God of war

Ares was the god of war in all its fearsome brutality. He was the son of Zeus by his queen, Hera, but was little liked by his father and the other gods. The Greeks themselves had little love for the deity on account of the many horrors that war brought with it.

One goddess that did favour Ares was Aphrodite, the love goddess, with whom he fathered four children, though she was at the time already married to Hephaestus. Two of these children were Phobos (Fear) and Deimos (Terror), each representing concepts closely associated with war.

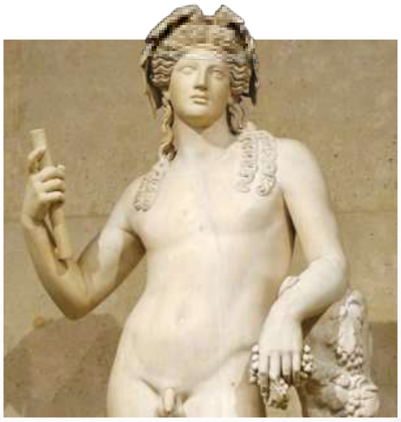


HEPHAESTUS

The smith of Olympus

Hephaestus was the great smith of the pantheon. Unlike the other gods, who were physically perfect, Hephaestus was lame, and he was thus the epitome of the outsider among the gods. He was cruelly mocked by the other gods for his deformity, though they admired the products of his hands.

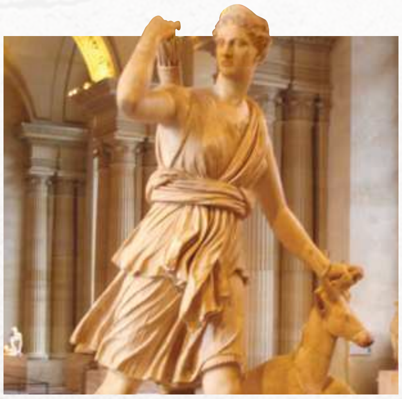
He was the patron of all who worked with metal. Learning that his faithless wife Aphrodite was making love to Ares, he made a magic net that fell upon them while they were abed. Thus trapped, he summoned the other Olympians to come and view and mock the adulterous pair.



DIONYSUS

God of wine and revelry

Dionysus was the god of wine and vine. He was the son of Zeus by the mortal woman Semele. The worship of him by his devotees was among the most startling of all the gods of Greece. Women figured prominently in his cult. The leaders, known as maenads, partook in ecstatic, sometimes violent, rituals in which they engaged in frenzied dancing and tore wild animals to pieces. Greek women would attend his ceremonies by going into the hills to engage in processions led by the maenads. There they would drink themselves to stupefaction in the Bacchanalia celebration.



ARTEMIS

Virgin goddess of the hunt

Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and daughter of Zeus by Letos. She was a virgin huntress – often depicted carrying a bow and arrows – and also the patroness of women undergoing childbirth. Being the goddess of virginity and a protector of young girls, she fiercely guarded her own modesty. When the unlucky hunter Actaeon stumbled upon her while she was bathing in a sacred spring, the goddess, outraged at having been seen unclothed, turned him into a stag for his transgression. His own hounds promptly tore him limb from limb.

APOLLO

God of music, healing and prophecy

Handsome Apollo had his two main cult centres in Greece at Delphi and on the island of Delos. At Delphi resided his chief oracle and priestess, the Pythia, also known as the Oracle of Delphi. There at his shrine she would receive petitioners seeking to question her about the future.

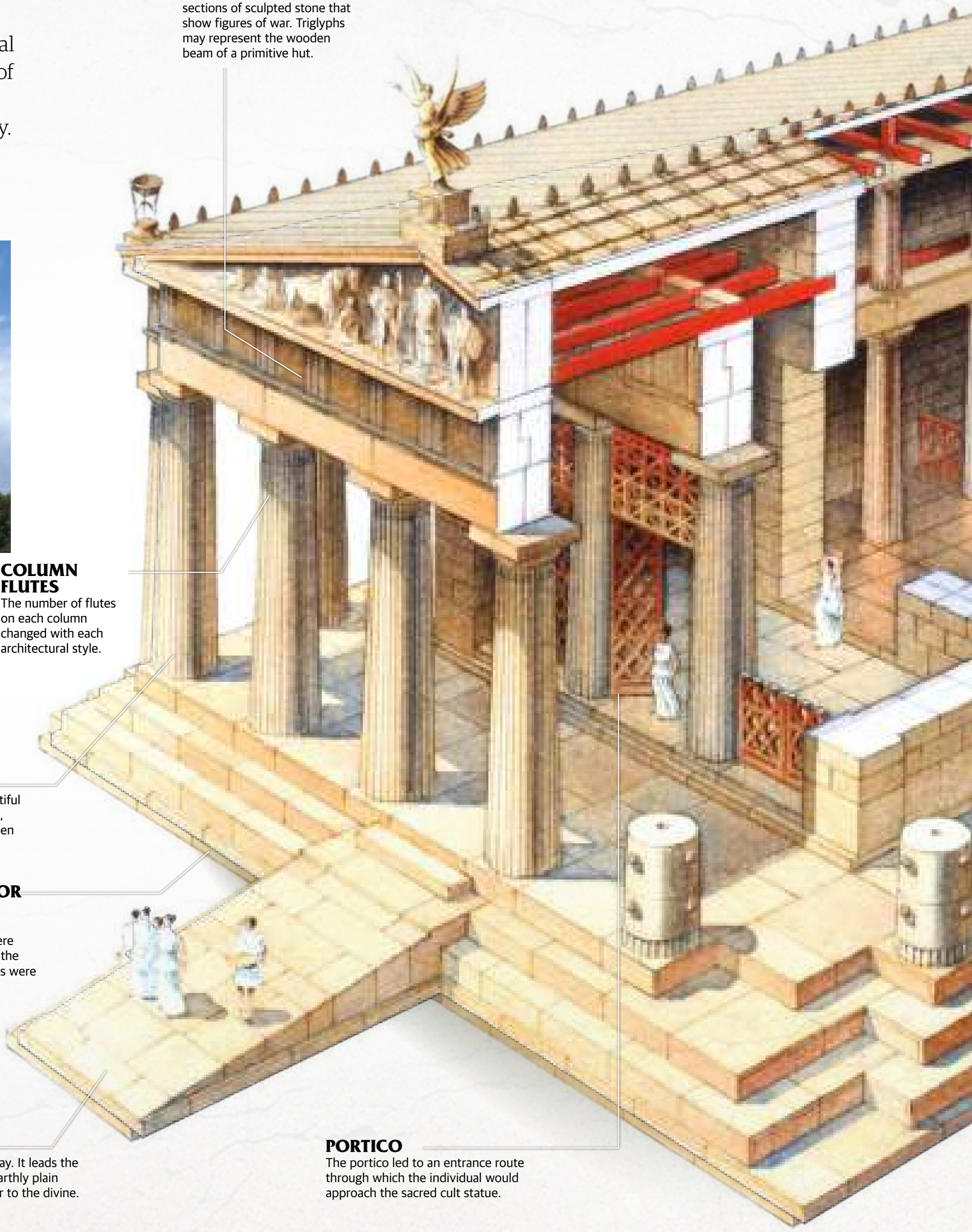
The weapon of Apollo was the bow. When his priest Chryses was mistreated by the Greeks at Troy, he struck down many of them with plague-carrying arrows. He was also said to pull the Sun behind him in his chariot.

GREEK TEMPLES

INSIDE THESE MULTI-USE ARCHITECTURAL MARVELS

THE TEMPLE acted as a cosmic generator. It was regarded as a dwelling designed for the gods and was also seen as a reception area for prayer, magical petition and divination. It also became a political symbol that emphasised the might and power of the state through ancient architectural achievement. The temple, now the most famous symbol of ancient Greece, was also functional - it housed important official offices and acted as a storage centre and a treasury.

The Doric temple of Segesta



METOPES AND TRIGLYPHS
Metopes are individual sections of sculpted stone that show figures of war. Triglyphs may represent the wooden beam of a primitive hut.

COLUMN FLUTES
The number of flutes on each column changed with each architectural style.

COLUMNS
Valued for their beautiful architectural features, columns were also seen as pillars of the sky.

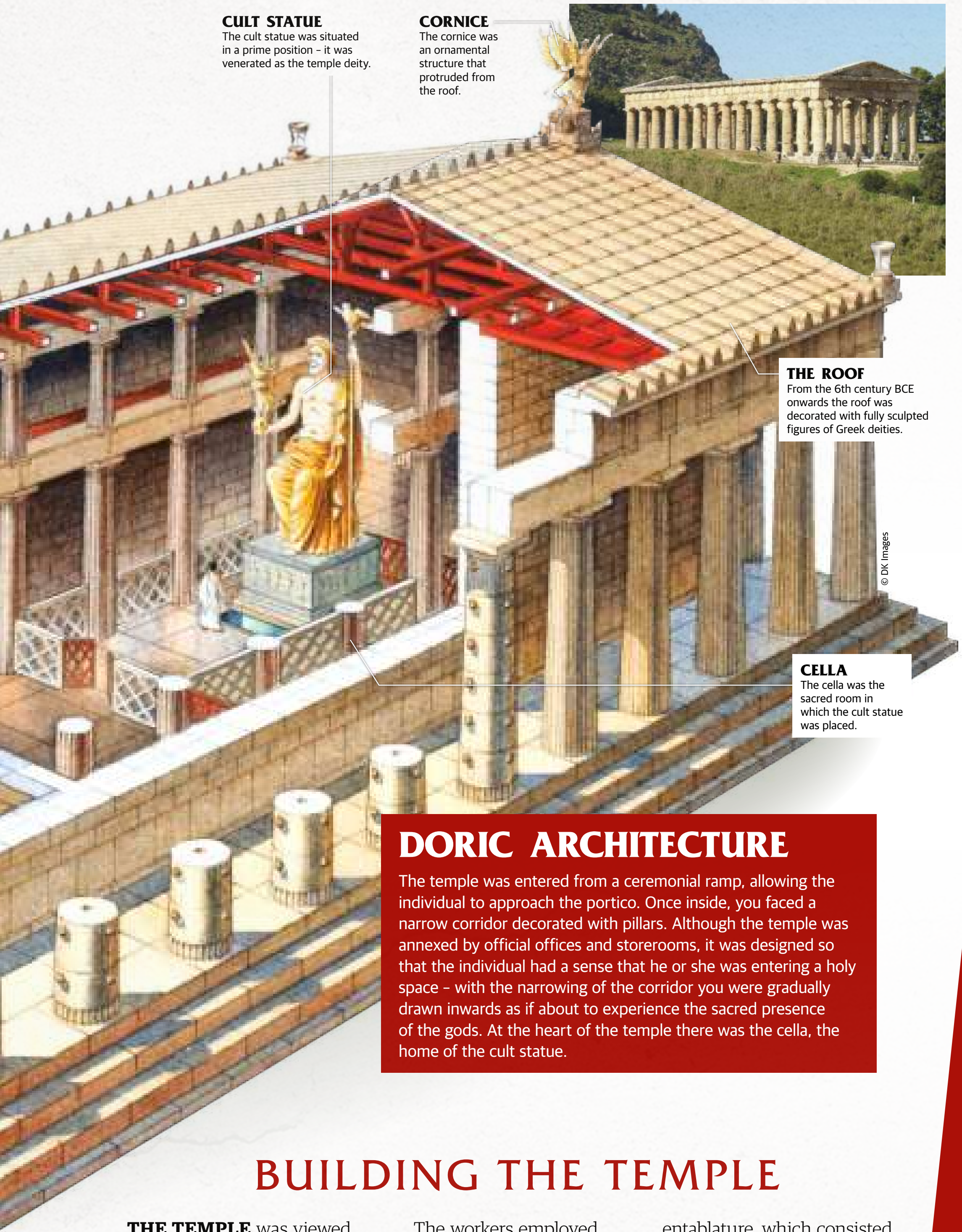
STEREOBATE OR FOUNDATION BLOCKS
Foundation blocks were placed at the base of the temple. Doric columns were directly built upon the stereobate.

THE RAMP
A ceremonial causeway. It leads the individual from the earthly plain and guides him or her to the divine.

PORTICO
The portico led to an entrance route through which the individual would approach the sacred cult statue.

THE PARTHENON

Location:
Athenian Acropolis, Greece
Length of construction:
447 BCE - 438 BCE
Designer: Phidias
Type of building/purpose:
Temple and treasury
Type of architecture:
Classical - Doric
Cost of construction:
In modern terms, it is estimated that the Parthenon cost over £3 million
Architects:
Ictinos and Callicrates
Area coverage: 69.5m x 30.9m



CULT STATUE
The cult statue was situated in a prime position – it was venerated as the temple deity.

CORNICE
The cornice was an ornamental structure that protruded from the roof.

THE ROOF
From the 6th century BCE onwards the roof was decorated with fully sculpted figures of Greek deities.

CELLA
The cella was the sacred room in which the cult statue was placed.

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DORIC ARCHITECTURE

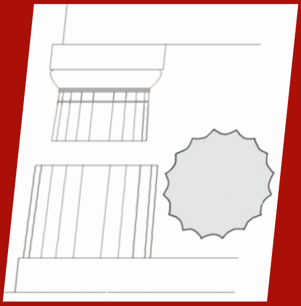
The temple was entered from a ceremonial ramp, allowing the individual to approach the portico. Once inside, you faced a narrow corridor decorated with pillars. Although the temple was annexed by official offices and storerooms, it was designed so that the individual had a sense that he or she was entering a holy space – with the narrowing of the corridor you were gradually drawn inwards as if about to experience the sacred presence of the gods. At the heart of the temple there was the cella, the home of the cult statue.

BUILDING THE TEMPLE

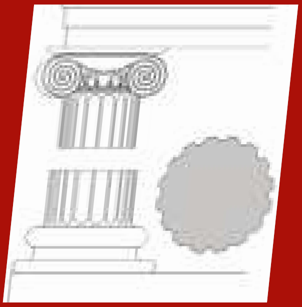
THE TEMPLE was viewed not only as an edifice of marble, wood and stone but a magical structure designed on astronomical principles. With this in mind, early construction began with the foundation ceremony, creating a base (stereobate). This consisted of several layers of stone blocks, their tips protruding above ground.

The workers employed simple tools of bronze and copper. During construction they also used mallets, chisels and ropes to create a further foundation block called a crepidoma, which acted as a base for the columns and walls. The columns, which were made of several drums of fluted stone, supported the entablature, which consisted of the architrave and the frieze that lay below the cornice. Temple construction could take over a decade, the building often covered 115 metres by 55 metres of land and boasted columns that reached between 15 and 20 metres in height. On completion, the temple was decorated by craftsmen.

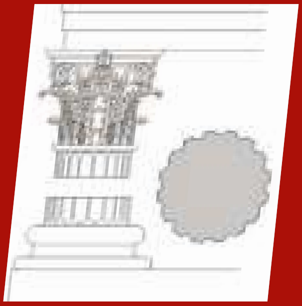
HOW TO IDENTIFY GREEK COLUMNS



These columns are short, heavy structures with plain capitals. They have no base and their height measures four to eight times their diameter. They are decorated with 20 flutes. The base of the column was placed directly on the stylobate (or foundation stone).



Ionic columns are graceful and slender – they differ from the Doric in that they are designed with a large base for extra support. They are easily distinguished by their large, scrolled features. The Ionic column has 24 flutes.



The Corinthian column is ornate and elaborate and is often more appealing than the Doric and Ionic columns described above. The column is tall and slim. Designed with 24 flutes, it is crafted with a scrumptious capital, which is sculpted with scrolls and acanthus leaves.

SECRETS OF THE ORACLE

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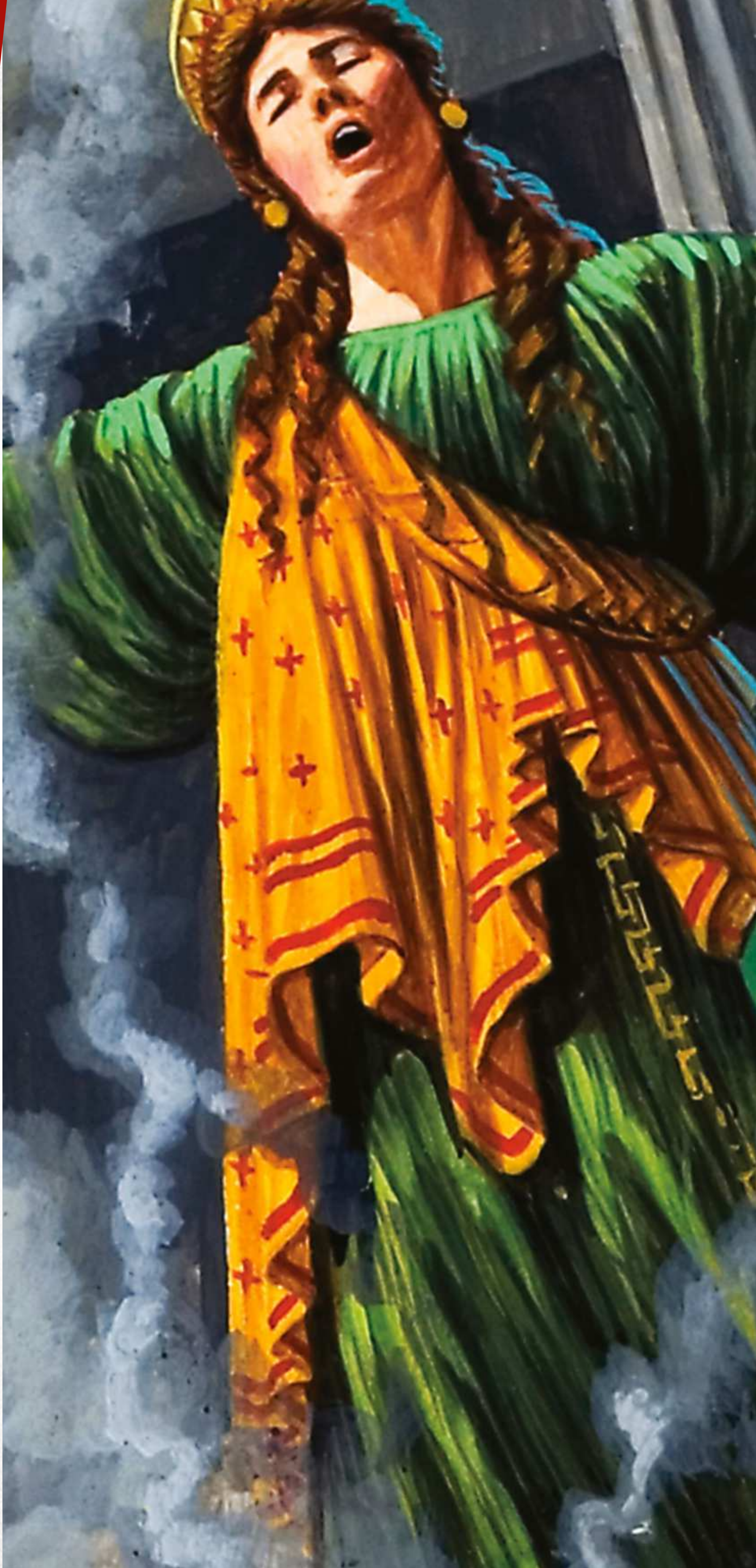
THE ORACLES OF DELPHI HAVE BEEN SHROUDED IN MYSTERY FOR MILLENNIA, BUT NOW SCIENTISTS BELIEVE THEY HAVE AN EXPLANATION

ANCIENT GREECE was a world dominated by men. Men filled the highest positions in society, men fought on the battlefield and men ruled the mightiest empires. However, all these men, from the lowliest peasant to the emperor himself, sought the council and advice of one person - and that person was a woman.

Delphi had long traditions of being the centre of the world; it was said that Zeus himself named it the navel of Gaia. According to legend, a huge serpent, named Python, guarded the spot before it was slain by the infant god Apollo. When Apollo's arrows pierced it, its body fell into a fissure and great fumes arose from the crevice as its carcass rotted. All those who stood over the gaping fissure fell into sudden, often violent, trances. In this state, it was believed that Apollo would possess them and fill them with divine presence.

These peculiar occurrences attracted Apollo-worshipping settlers during the Mycenaean era, and slowly but surely the primitive sanctuary grew into a shrine, and then, by the 7th century BCE, a temple. It would come to house a single person, chosen to serve as the bridge between this world and the next. Named after the great serpent, this chosen seer was named the Pythia - the oracle.

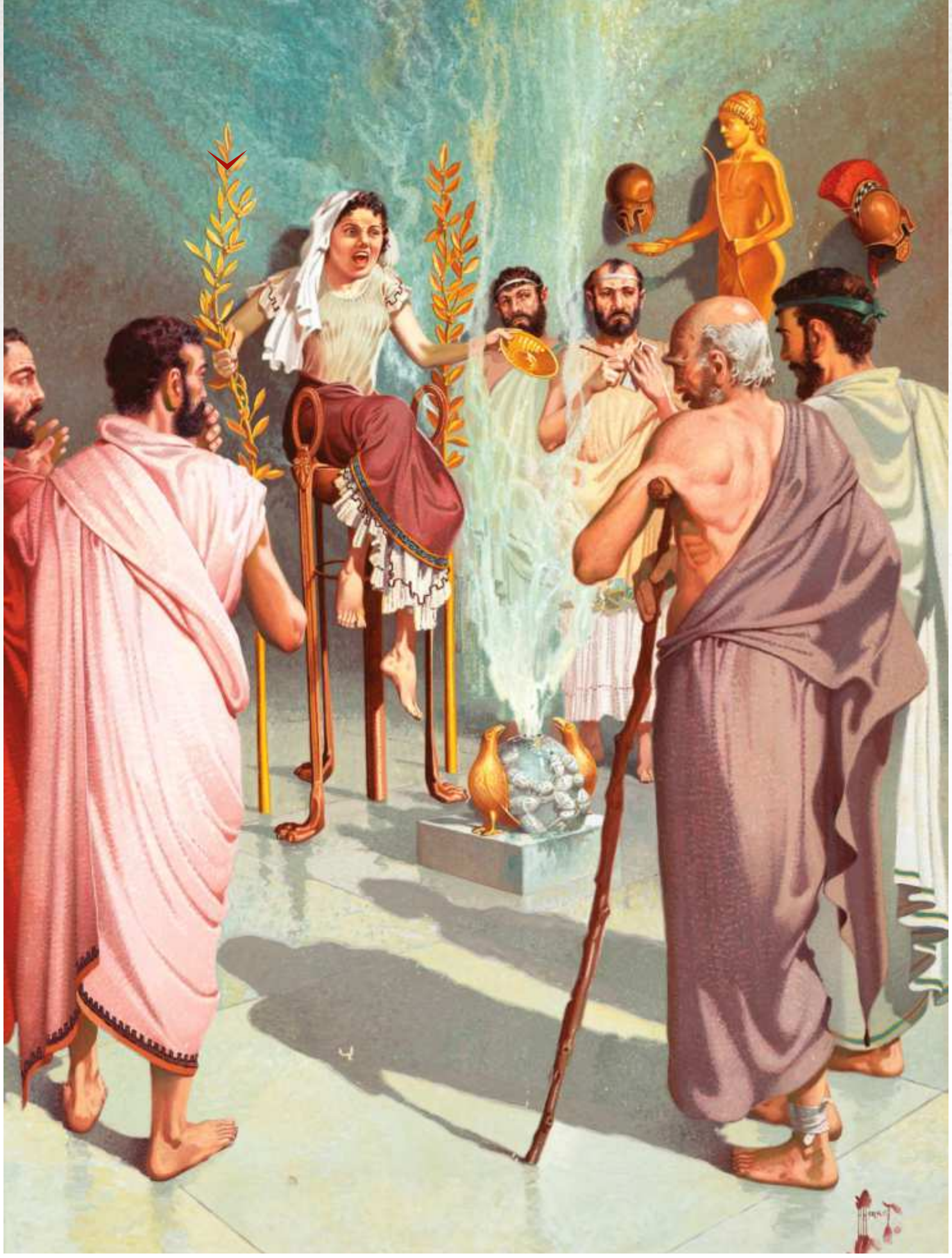
Communication with a god was no small matter, and not just anyone could be allowed or trusted to serve in this divine position. It was decided that a pure, chaste and honest young virgin would be the most appropriate. However, there was one drawback - they were prone to attracting negative attention from the men who sought their council, which resulted in oracles being raped and violated. Older women of at least 50 began to fill the position, and as a reminder of what used to be, they would dress in the virginal garments of old.



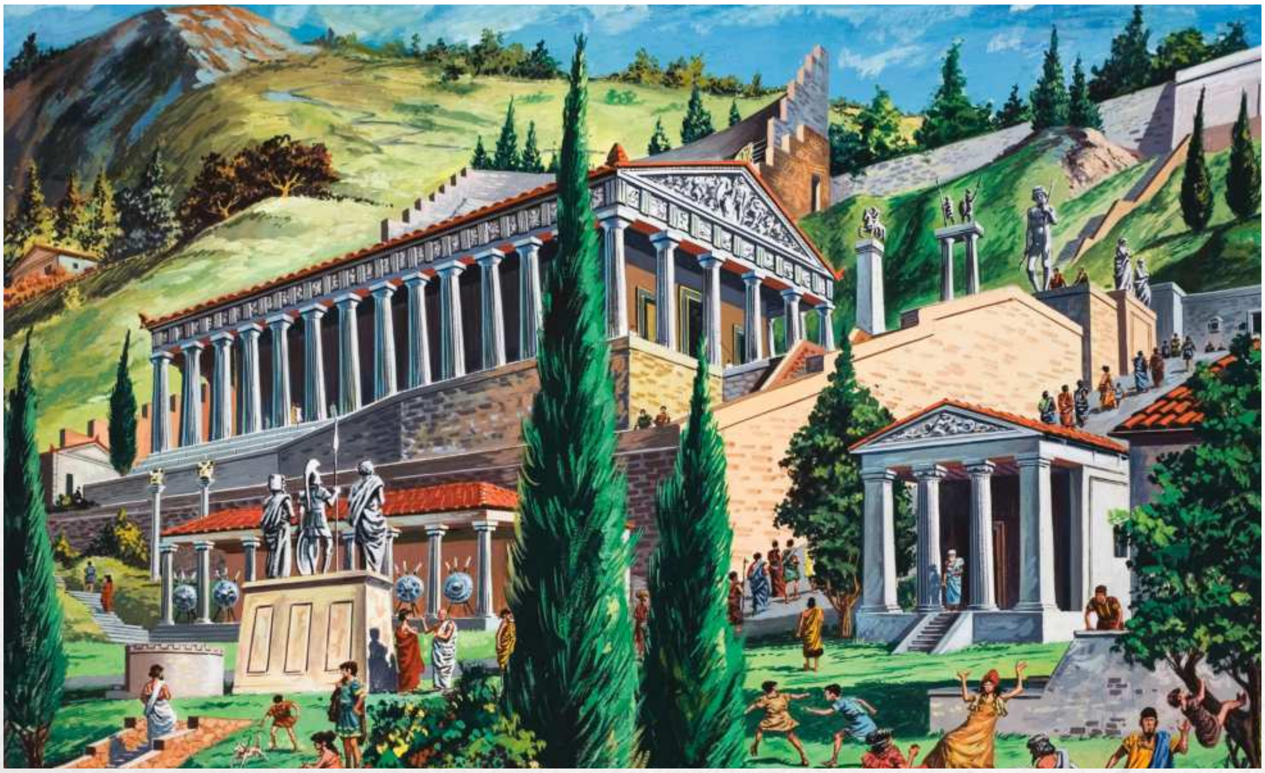
These older women were often chosen from the priestesses of Delphi temple, but could also be any respected native of Delphi. Educated noblewomen were prized, but even peasants could fill the position. Those Pythia who were previously married were required to relinquish all family responsibility and even their individual identities. To be an oracle was to take up an ancient and vitally important role – one that transcended the self and entered into legend. Pythia were so important that it was essential that they were a blank slate – children, husbands and any links to previous life had to be severed in favour of Apollo and divinity.

The reason for the growing importance of the oracles was simple – the Pythia provided answers. For an ambitious and religious civilisation, this very visual and vocal link to the gods was treated with the utmost respect. For the nine warmest months of each year, on the seventh day of each month the Pythia would accept questions from all members of Greek society. This was to correspond with the belief that Apollo deserted the temple during the winter months.

After being 'purified' by fasting, drinking holy water and bathing in the sacred Castalian Spring, the Pythia would assume her position upon a tripod seat, clasping laurel reeds in one hand and a dish of spring water in the other. Positioned above the gaping fissure, the vapours of the ancient vanquished serpent would wash over her and she would enter the realm of the divine.



The Temple of Apollo at Delphi

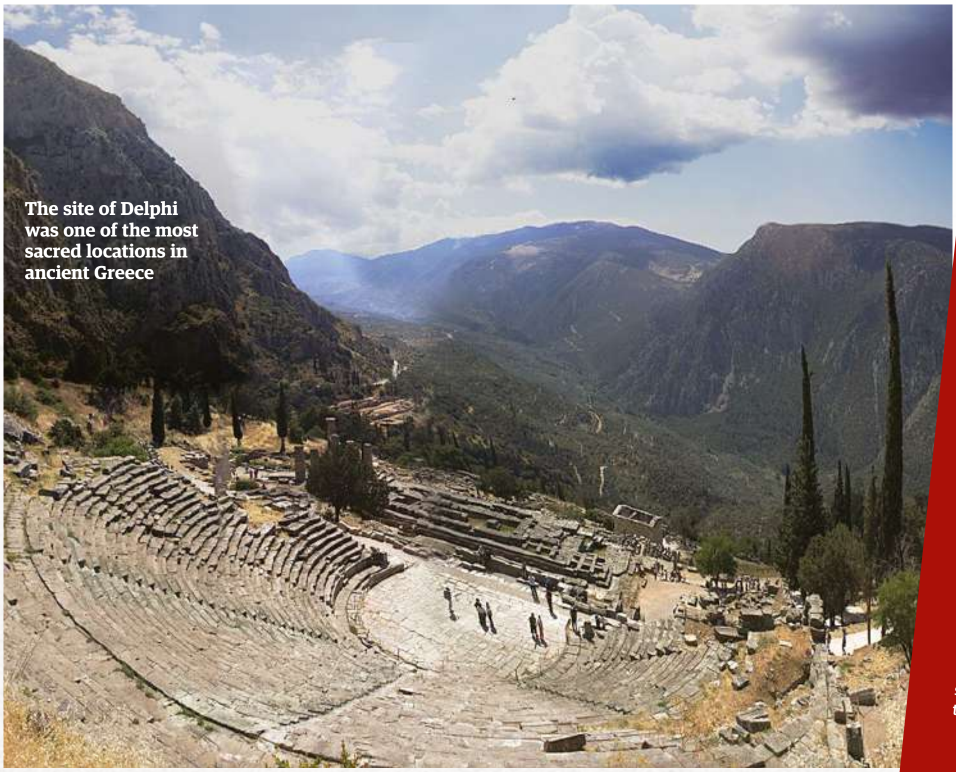


People flocked from far and wide to speak to the woman who could communicate with the gods. Known as consultants, many of those who wished to ask the oracle a question would travel for days or even weeks to reach Delphi. Once they arrived they underwent an intense grilling from the priests, who would determine the genuine cases and instruct them the correct way to frame their questions. Those who were approved then had to undergo a variety of traditions, such as carrying laurel wreaths to the temple. It was also encouraged for consultants to provide a monetary donation as well as a sacrificial animal, whose guts would be studied. If the signs were seen as unfavourable, the consultant could be sent home. Finally, the consultant was allowed to approach the Pythia and ask his question. In some accounts, it seems the oracles gave the answers, but others report the Pythia would utter incomprehensible words that the priests would 'translate' into verse. Once he received his answer, the consultant would journey home to act upon the advice.

This was the tricky part. The oracle received a multitude of visitors in the nine days she was available, from farmers desperate to know the outcome of the harvest to emperors asking if they should wage war on their enemies, and her answers were not always clear. Responses, or their translations by the temple priests, often seemed deliberately phrased so that, no matter the outcome, the oracle would always be right. It was essential for the consultant to carefully consider her words, or else risk a bad harvest, or even the defeat of an entire army. When Croesus, the king of Lydia, asked if he should attack Persia, he received the response: "If you cross the river, a great empire will be destroyed." He viewed this as a good omen and went ahead with the invasion. Unfortunately, the great empire that was destroyed was his own. In this way, the oracle, just like the gods, was infallible, and her divine reputation grew. To question the oracle was to question the gods - and that was unthinkable.

Soon, no major decision was made before consulting the oracle of Delphi. It wasn't just Greek people, but also foreign dignitaries, leaders and kings who travelled to Delphi for a chance to ask a question. Those who could afford it would pay great sums of money for a fast pass through the long lines of pilgrims and commoners. Using these donations, the temple grew in size and prominence.

Quickly, Delphi seemed to be fulfilling its own prophecy of being the centre of the world, and attracted visitors for the Pythian Games, a precursor of the Olympic Games. On the influence of the oracle's statements, Delphi became a powerful and prosperous city-state. The oracle sat at the centre of not just the city of Delphi, but the great Greek empire itself. No important decision was made without her consultation, and so, for nearly 1,000 years, the position of perhaps the greatest political and social influence in the ancient world was occupied by a woman.


The site of Delphi was one of the most sacred locations in ancient Greece

ASK THE ORACLE

The Pythia always has the answer

I'm a Spartan lawmaker and recently outside influences have been threatening our proud nation. Are these other countries a bad influence or am I being an old stick in the mud?
Lycurgus, Sparta
Love of money and nothing else will ruin Sparta.

I know it's silly, but I'm absolutely obsessed with my own death! Do you have any idea what I can do to prevent my early demise?
Lysander, Sparta
Beware the serpent, earthborn, in craftiness coming behind thee.

I've recently captured my own island. I have to come up with some laws but I'm not sure what sort of ruler I should be. Any advice?
Solon, Athens
Seat yourself now amid ships, for you are the pilot of Athens. Grasp the helm fast in your hands; you have many allies in your city.

An old foe has reared his ugly head and wants to face my soldiers in battle. The only problem is that we are vastly outnumbered. Should I face him?
Leonidas, Sparta
The strength of bulls or lions cannot stop the foe. No, he will not leave off, until he tears the city or the king limb from limb.

Although I'm already a king, I feel unfulfilled with my life. I want to do something really impressive. What should I do to make my name?
Philip, Macedon
With silver spears you may conquer the world.

My friend is a really important person, but he's been making some really questionable decisions lately. Should I stick by him?
Cicero, Arpino
Make your own nature, not the advice of others, your guide in this life.

My enemy will not leave me alone! I know I can't fight him, but is there a way I can at least defend myself from his attacks?
Themistocles, Athens
A wall of wood alone shall be uncaptured, a boon to you and your children.

My friend, Socrates, is such a know-it-all. He literally has an answer for everything. Please settle a dispute for us: is there anyone who is smarter than him?
Chaerephon, Athens
No human is wiser.

My dad was a very famous soldier and everyone expects me to follow in his footsteps. Now war has broken out, I feel pressured to join the army. But I am not sure. Should I sign up?
Gaios, Delphi
You will go, you will return not in the battle you will perish

I've sacrificed everything, even family members, for power. But it's still not enough. What can I do to satisfy my greed?
Nero, Antium
Your presence here outrages the god that you seek. Go back, matricide! The number 73 marks the hour of your downfall!

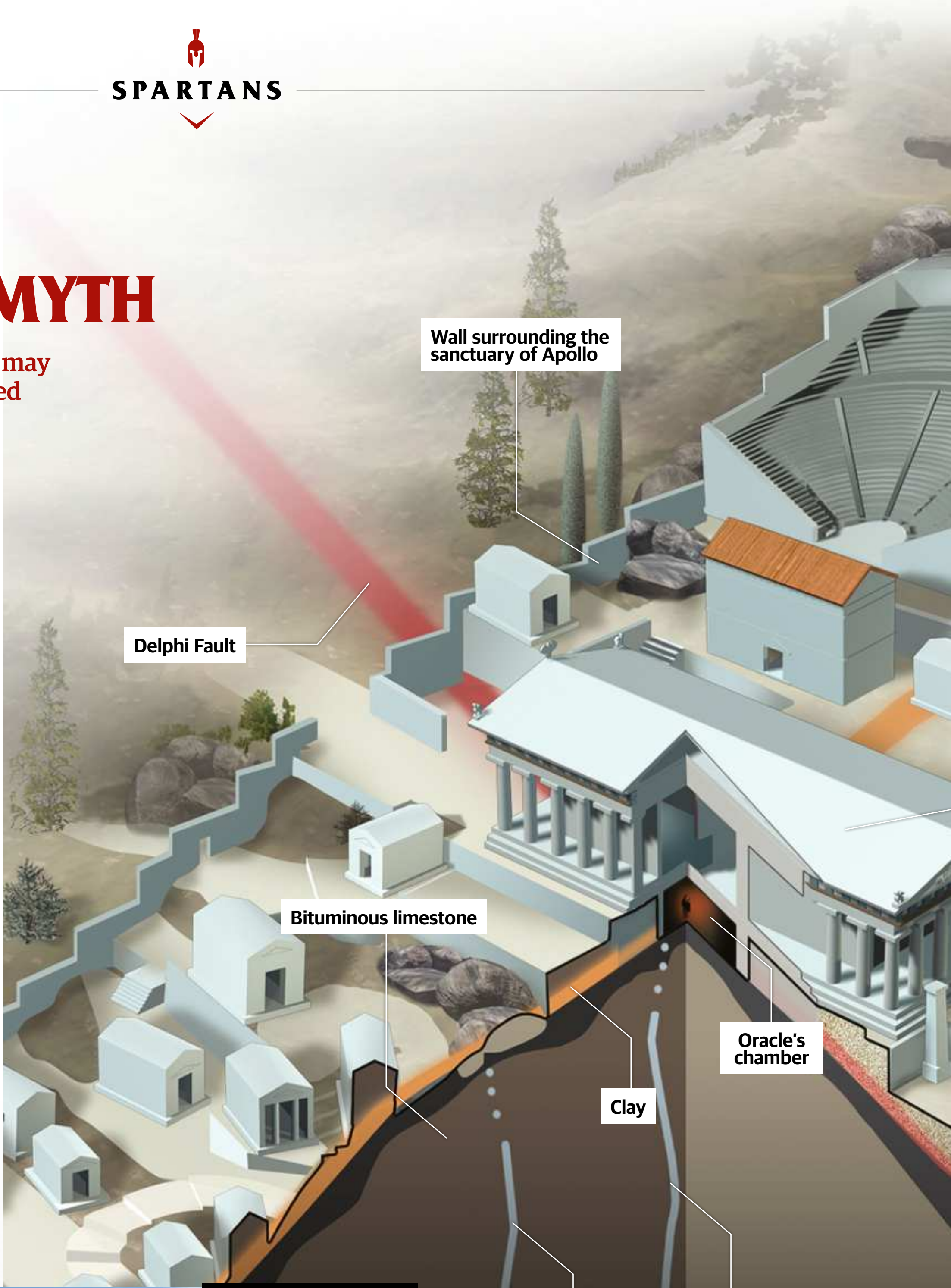
THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE MYTH

Excavations have revealed that there may be more to the story than first believed

Ever since the emergence of science in society, a scientific explanation for the Pythia's visionary trances has been sought. One of the most valuable accounts of the oracle's trances comes from Plutarch, who served as a priest at the temple in Delphi. He described how sweet-smelling gases arising from the fissure would cause the priestesses to fall into a strange trance. It seemed there was some truth to Plutarch's account, as when archaeologists studied the temple ruins they discovered a few peculiar features.

The inner sanctum where the Pythia sat, for example, was two to four metres below the level of the surrounding floor, and there was also a nearby drain for spring water. This structure was unique when compared to any other Greek temple. All of this proved one thing - that there was definitely something strange going on in the temple of Apollo.

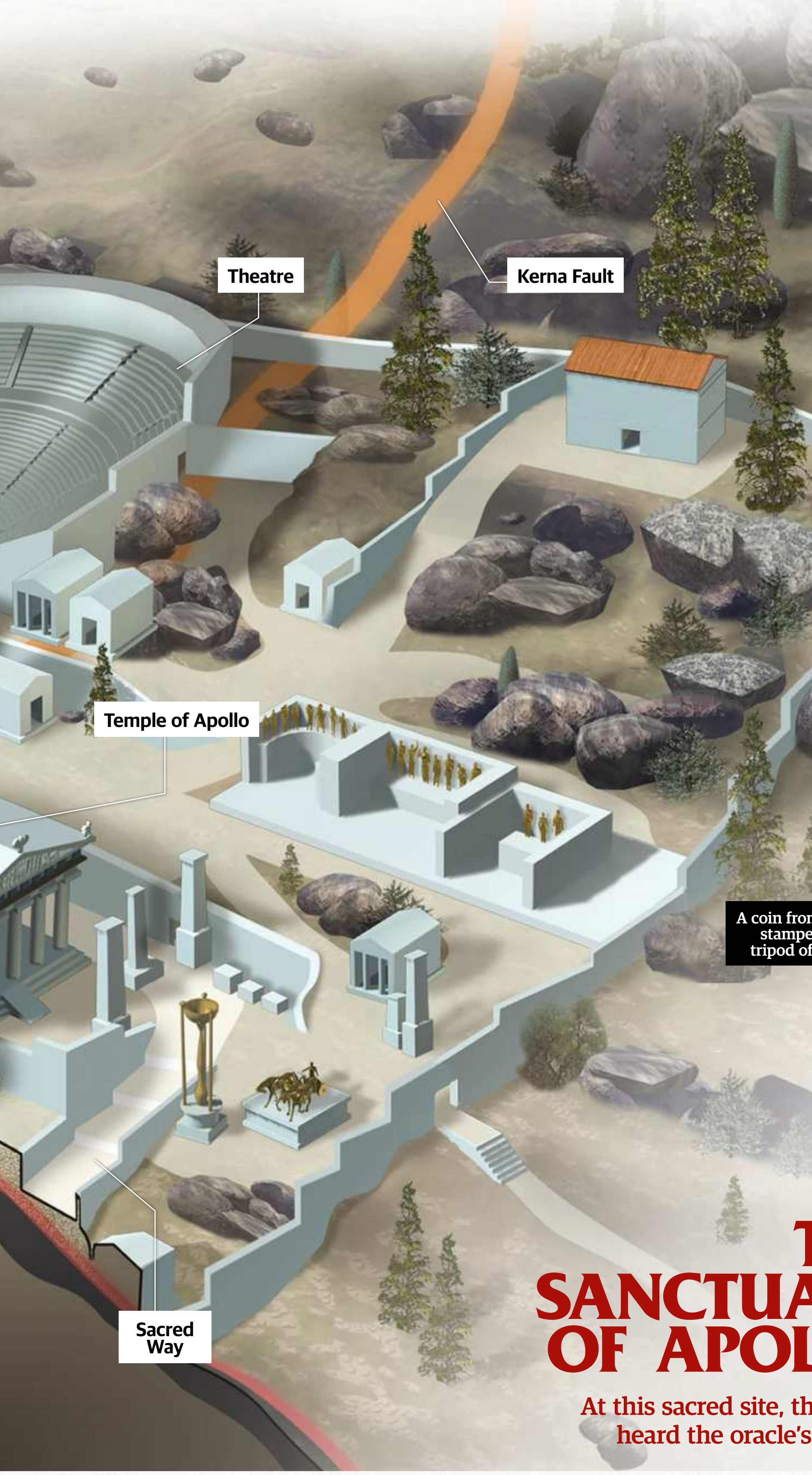
Curious about the existence of the fissure mentioned in Plutarch's accounts, in 1892, French archaeologists set about excavating the ruins of the temple with the goal of discovering an ancient cave or hole in the ground. However, surprisingly, nothing was found. By 1904, it was declared that Plutarch's temple fumes were simply an ancient myth, and never really existed. In 1948, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* read: "Excavation has rendered improbable the post-classical theory of a chasm with mephitic vapours."



The remains of the temple of Apollo as it stands today

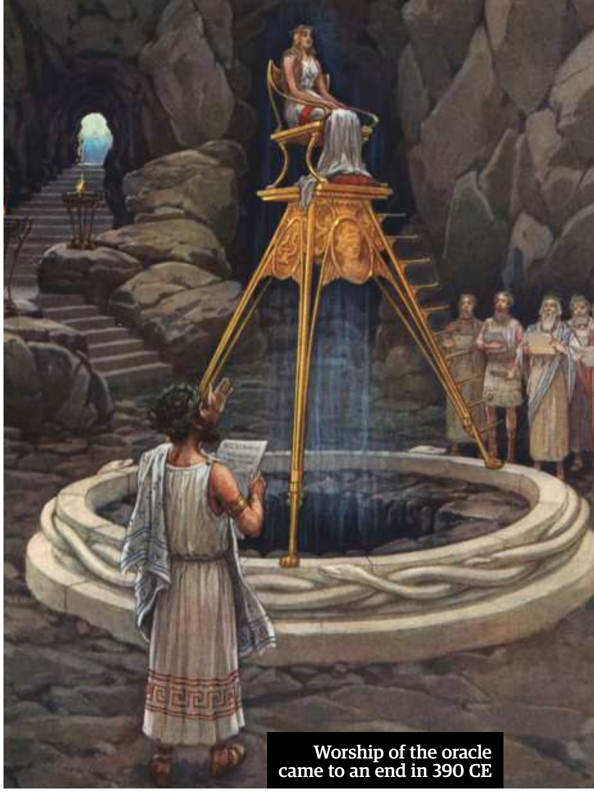
ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

The oracles claimed their trances came from Apollo, scientists blame gases, but these aren't the only explanations for the peculiar incidents



THE SANCTUARY OF APOLLO

At this sacred site, thousands heard the oracle's wisdom



Worship of the oracle came to an end in 390 CE

A coin from 480 BCE stamped with the tripod of the oracle

That was believed to be true until the late 1980s, when a new team of scientists decided to investigate the ruins for themselves. The rocks they discovered beneath the temple were oily bituminous limestone and were fractured by two faults that crossed beneath the temple. This had to be more than a coincidence. They theorised that tectonic movements and ancient earthquakes caused friction along the faults. Combined with the spring water that ran beneath the temple, methane, ethylene and ethane gas would rise through them to the centre and directly into the temple. The low room with its limited ventilation and lack of oxygen would help amplify the effect of the gases and induce the trance-like symptoms experienced by the oracles.

It was the ethylene gas especially that drew a lot of interest. Ethylene is a sweet-smelling gas, just like Plutarch had reported, and in small doses is said to have the ability to cause trances and frenzied states. Tests conducted with ethylene reported that a dosage higher than 20 per cent could cause unconsciousness; however, less than that and the patient was able to sit up and answer questions, though their voice was altered. There were also instances of fits, thrashing, loss of memory and altered speech patterns, all of which correspond with Plutarch's accounts.

However, as is always the case with speculative science, this theory is not universally agreed upon, and other scientists argue that other gases such as carbon dioxide and methane are responsible for the hallucinogenic states. Either way, it seems that the answer to the question of the mysterious Delphi oracles lies in the peculiar structure of the temple and unique geography of the site, which all aligned to produce something truly unique and remarkable.

SNAKE VENOM

It is possible that the trances were brought on by snake venom, particularly that of the cobra or krait snake. After becoming immunised against the venom, a bite from a snake can produce hallucinogenic symptoms that affect the person's emotional and mental state.

LAUREL LEAVES

Laurel leaves were always carried by the oracles, and they were also reported to chew on them because of their link with Apollo. It has been hypothesised that it was the leaves that brought on the oracle's trances, but as they are not hallucinogenic, this is unlikely.

POLITICAL PUPPETS

One of the most popular theories explaining the state of the oracles is that they were faking their trances. Because of the power that their prophecies could hold, it's theorised that the priests or the women themselves manipulated this power as they saw fit.

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CULTURE

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From pots to poems, unearth the relics that prove Sparta had more to offer than bloodshed

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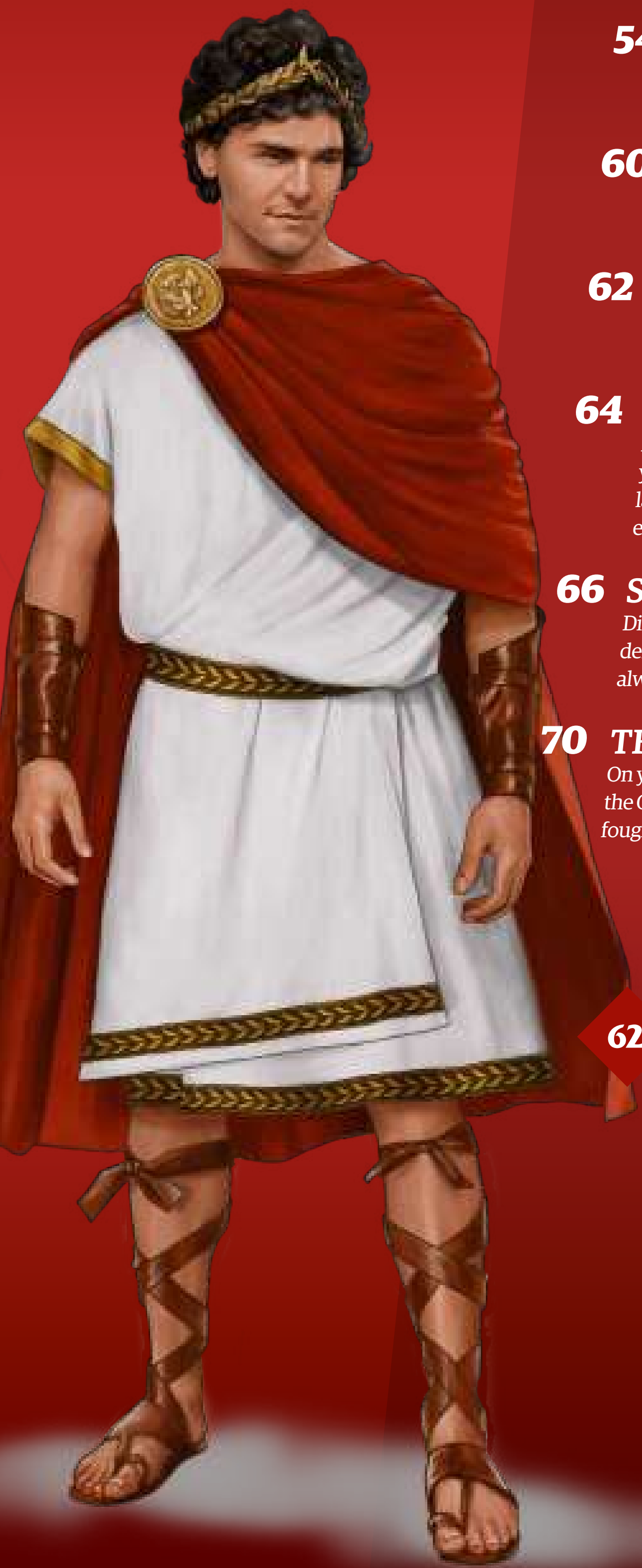
On your marks! Get set! Go... and find out how the Olympics evolved from a smattering of hard-fought contests into a national festival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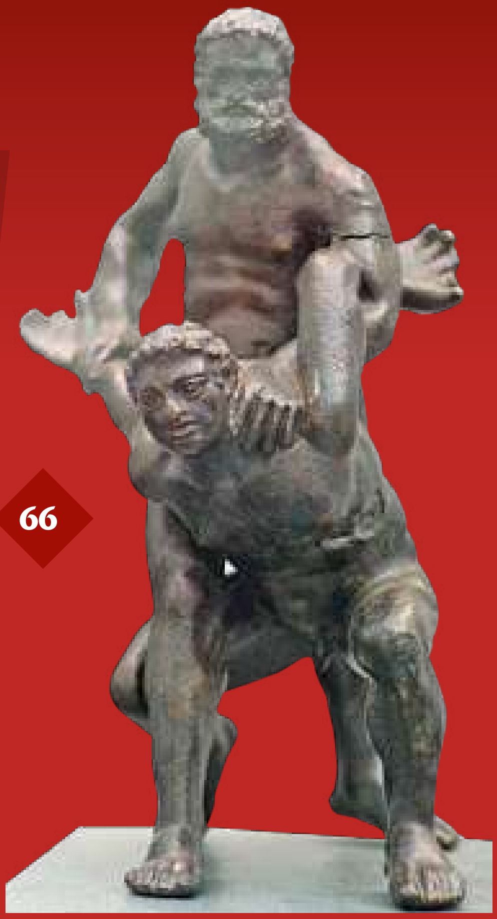
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ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN ANCIENT SPARTA

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THIS CITY-STATE IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WASN'T JUST KNOWN FOR ITS MILITARY

WORDS BY ◆ **KATHARINE MARSH**

Possibly the most famous piece of art to come out of Sparta, this bust of a hoplite - believed to be of either Leonidas or a god - is currently housed in the Archaeological Museum of Sparta

WHEN YOU hear the word 'Sparta', your mind will probably go straight to battles and soldiers, and with good reason. Sparta's military was so powerful that its memory has echoed down the centuries, creating a lasting legacy. It's very unlikely that you'd think of art, poetry and architecture – why would you?

As it turns out, Sparta wasn't just a territory filled to the brim with warriors. Art played a role in life there, even if it wasn't to the same extent as city-states like Athens, with their sprawling temple complexes and enormous statues. Spartan workshops saw sculptures carved from stone, vases painted vibrant colours, bone and ivory whittled into figures and bronze melted and twisted into beautiful vessels.

It may surprise many to learn that at one time, Sparta was actually a major artistic centre. Several artists lived and worked there, and while the majority were immigrants, coming over from places like Magnesia, others were Spartan born and bred, like Gitiadas, who created the cult statue of Athena Chalkioikos, as well as votive gifts for Artemis in Amyclae.

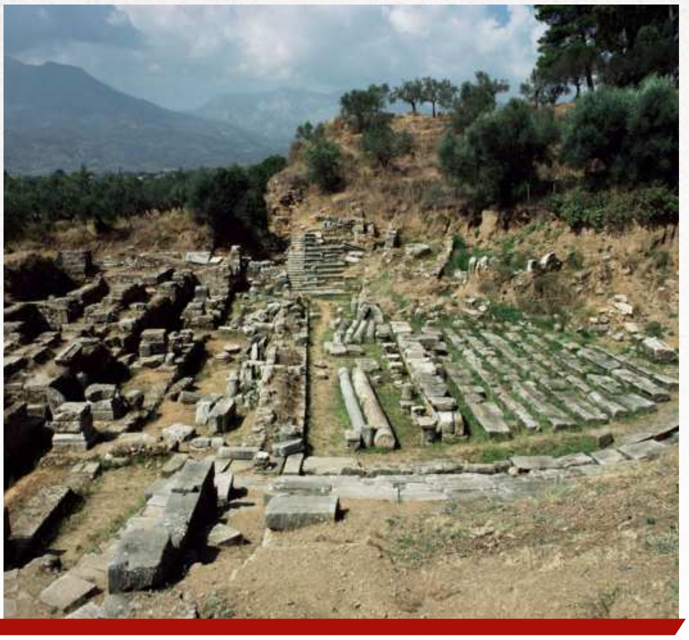
Here's a tour around the arts and crafts that have largely been forgotten about in favour of other aspects of Spartan society. After all, what's a civilisation without art?

ABANDONMENT ISSUES

When travelling across Greece today, it's relatively easy to stumble upon some ruins from antiquity. You'll find them all across the mainland, Crete and in the archipelago of scattered islands in the Aegean Sea. So why haven't we been left with more Spartan remains?

Sparta had held its walls against invaders from Athens and Persia, and it had defeated many other states in battle, but the Goths had been steadily making their way through Greece. They'd sacked Athens, Corinth and Argos, and then they sacked Sparta in 267 CE. Its legacy of fearless warriors didn't save it. In 396 it was the Visigoths, led by Alaric, who stormed the walls, and soon after, Sparta was abandoned.

People didn't really move back to Sparta. It had been overrun and defeated, so everyone had died or moved on. It wasn't until 1834 that King Otto of Greece ordered a new Sparta to be built on the site of its ancient namesake and people started coming back, but the original buildings had been destroyed by invaders and the elements over the ensuing 2,000 years. All we're left with now are ruins.


The remains of Sparta's once-great theatre

A CITY OF BRONZE

THERE WAS ONE PARTICULAR MEDIUM IN WHICH SPARTA EXCELLED

IT WAS a Spartan speciality, and with good reason – they were really good at it. Sparta was famed for its bronze-working, with master artisans creating all sorts of vessels and tripods with small, ornate details, as well as mirrors and other utensils. In fact, certain items became characteristic of the territory, and by the 8th century BCE, small Spartan horses began to be favoured over those from elsewhere.

Spartan bronze's popularity continued to grow, and towards the end of the 7th century BCE, large mixing bowls, or kraters, and smaller hydria, or water jars, were being produced en masse. They were hammered into shape by experienced craftsmen who then decorated them with solid cast figures. These were anything from floral arrangements and snakes to characters from Greek mythology, with the handles of the vessels often in the shape of human figures.

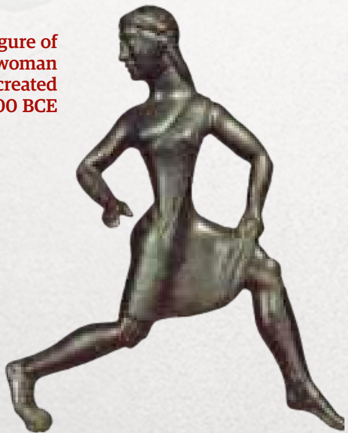
The expertise of Spartan craft was such that many bronze works in archaic Greece can be traced back to the city-state rather than to its neighbours, which would later take up the mantle. Spartans diversified into votives and figurines of people doing mundane, everyday things like dancing or making bread. However, sometimes they made statues that were larger than life, although none of these survive in their entirety.

It's hard to deny that Sparta had a distinct style – much like in most other aspects of its society. Bronze vessels from the region looked and felt different to those from elsewhere in archaic Greece, while their disc-shaped mirrors took things a step further. In Greek art of the period naked women are incredibly rare, but the Spartans had no qualms about adorning their mirrors with young, scantily clad female figures, possibly inspired by the local cult of Artemis Orthia.

Over time, however, Spartans abandoned the styles that had made them their names, instead beginning to create items that followed in the convention of the rest of Greece. Bronze-working then began to decline as its popularity waned, and the once-high appetite for Spartan statuettes, vessels, jewellery and figurines shrank to almost nothing.

At its height, though, Spartan bronze found its way all around the Mediterranean, with examples being found in Olympia, Attika, Arkadia and possibly even Egypt.

But it wasn't just bronze that was used by the Spartans. Wood was also used to create pieces, which were then decorated with ivory and gold. Faience, amber and gold have also been found at Spartan archaeological sites.


A bronze figure of a Spartan woman running, created c.520-500 BCE

TROUBLE BUILDING A LEGACY

WHAT LITTLE WE KNOW ABOUT SPARTAN ARCHITECTURE

IF YOU'VE ever been to Athens you won't have been able to miss the Acropolis, standing proud and upright on its perch and looking out over the entire city. On Crete you can tour the ancient palace at Knossos, mostly ruined but with walls and some ceilings still standing after more than 2,000 years. From these and other remains you can get a good sense of what it was like to walk down the streets of the cities in the hustle and bustle of antiquity. But what about Sparta?

Very little remains of Spartan architecture, which is a real shame. Temples, houses and barracks have all been destroyed throughout the centuries, leaving nothing but a few pieces of stone behind - but sometimes that's enough. Of what remains, perhaps the most famous is the Menelaion, dedicated to Menelaus and Helen of Troy, originally of Sparta - figures made famous by Homer's *Iliad*. Built around 700 BCE, the sanctuary suggests that perhaps Homer's tales had reached Sparta around or before then. We also know of the existence of other sanctuaries such as that of Artemis Orthia, which was constructed completely out of stone.

We also know that Spartan houses were built from sun-dried mud bricks and had red clay roof tiles. This was common throughout Greece, but it's thought that the Spartan houses were a little plainer. Then there's the theatre. When it was built it was the largest in ancient Greece, able to seat up to 15,000, and it had the stunning backdrop of Mount Taygetus. It truly was the jewel in Sparta's otherwise dull and practical crown.

The ruins of the Menelaion, with the stunning view of the mountains in the distance

GOING POTTY FOR POTTERY

THE SPARTANS DEVELOPED THEIR OWN STYLE OF THE POTTERY FOUND ACROSS ANCIENT GREECE

BY FAR the most abundant remains we have from the ancient Greeks are pieces of pottery. Sometimes they're complete pieces, other times just shards of painted terracotta, but from them archaeologists and historians have managed to build clearer pictures of ancient crafts and society. This is no different with Sparta.

By the 8th century BCE terracotta pottery was being created and painted in workshops all across Spartan territory, and the Spartans were good at it. Producing wares in the Geometric style as was seen in the rest of Greece at the time, amphorae were decorated with concentric circles on their necks and shoulders, as well as around the body.

During this time Spartan vessels made their way all over Greece and began to be traded in the further Mediterranean. Over time the pottery became colourless and insipid, but this was the case all over Greece, and it's thought that this change in style was a result of Sparta's reconnection with the wider known world, which caused a rising standard of technique.

The Geometric period was also a time of change – it was when an alphabet was introduced, saw the first Olympic Games and was when Homer was active, telling tales of Odysseus and the Trojan War in his *Odyssey* and *Iliad*.

As the Geometric period gave way to the black-figure style, Sparta followed suit, with Spartan artists creating their own characteristic style. This was when Spartan pottery really came into its own, and remains have been found in even the most remote corners of the Mediterranean.

The most popular shape of the time was the kylix, or drinking cup, and these were usually adorned with figural scenes and ornamental rows of black bands. The scenes were usually mythological or taken from real life with a heroic connotation, with winged human figures, sirens and sphinxes common. Although this period was known for its black figures – hence the name of the style – painters also used red and white for decorative effect.

It was during this period that particular Spartan artists became more prominent. One of these was Arkesilas Painter, who was active around 560 BCE. His most famous work, the Arkesilas Cup, which was found in the Etruscan city of Vulci, is one of the very few pieces that show a recognisable historical figure, in this case King Arkesilaos II of Cyrene. Other famous Spartan vase painters include the Boreades, Naukratis, Hunt and Rider painters.

WAXING LYRICAL

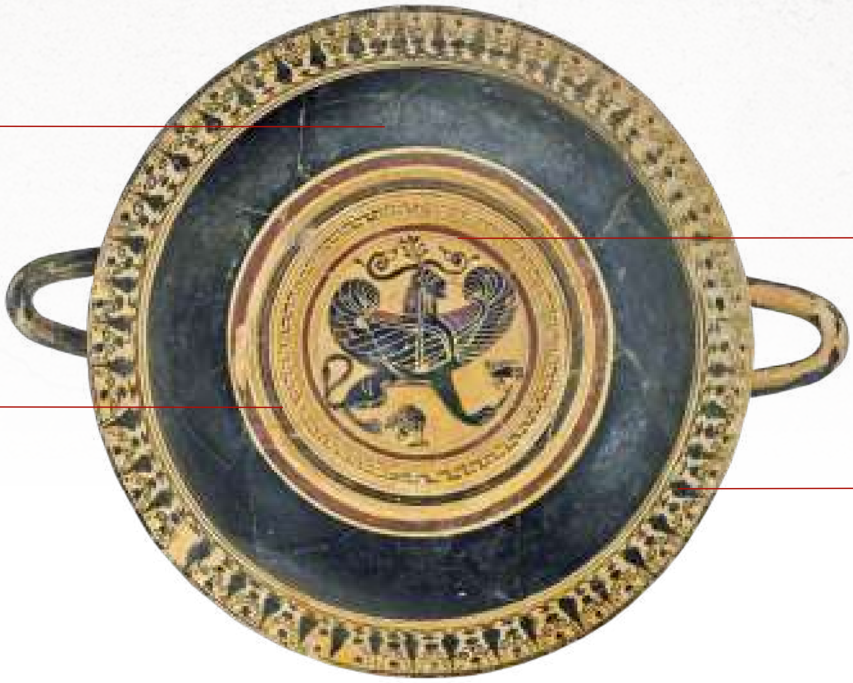
The juxtaposition seems odd – a military state writing poetry and choruses – but that doesn't make it any less true. The Spartans, like the other Greek city-states, had poets and writers – they just haven't been remembered like those of Athens and elsewhere.

Perhaps the most famous of all is Alcman, who flourished in the 7th century BCE, when he wrote choral lyrics to be used at Spartan festivals. The longest of these, a partheneion, or choral song for girls, was discovered in a 1st-century papyrus in Egypt in 1855, and he was even described in a 10th-century-CE Byzantine work as a man "of an extremely amorous disposition and the inventor of love poems". It is even thought that some of his work has been imitated by writers from Virgil to von Goethe.

Around the same time Sparta also enjoyed the poems of Tyrtaeus, who wrote about the military, apparently in an attempt to aid Sparta in winning the Second Messenian War against Messenia. He focuses on heroism and working for the common good of the community, both of which were incredibly Spartan ideals.

A 3rd-century-CE Roman portrait of Alcman

BLACK-FIGURE POTTERY



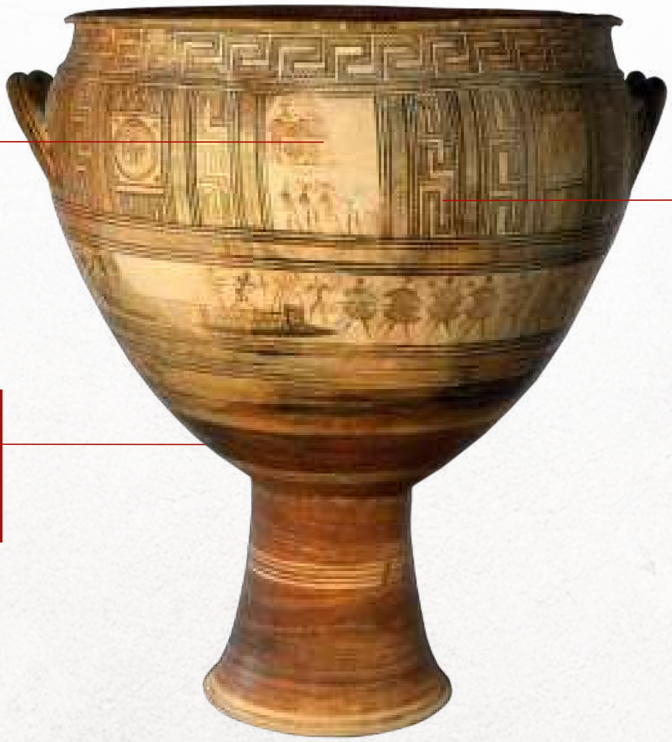
Local materials
Spartan wares were made from terracotta sourced from nearby quarries.

The main image
The focal point of black-figure pottery was the black block image. Here it is in the very centre.

Splash of colour
To add some extra depth and decoration, red and white paints were also used.

Borders
A common component of black-figure pottery were the decorative borders that marked the edges.

GEOMETRIC POTTERY



Monumental vessels
Geometric pottery used in funerals showed a renewed interest in painting figures, which would then grow during the black-figure phase.

Shapes
The Geometric style featured the kinds of shapes that people today would consider typical of ancient Greece.

Late Geometric
Created in the late first quarter of the 8th century BCE, this krater was made just before the Geometric style's decline.

ANCIENT GREEK THEATRES

WE DISCOVER HOW THESE MASSIVE AMPHITHEATRES WERE BUILT AND USED

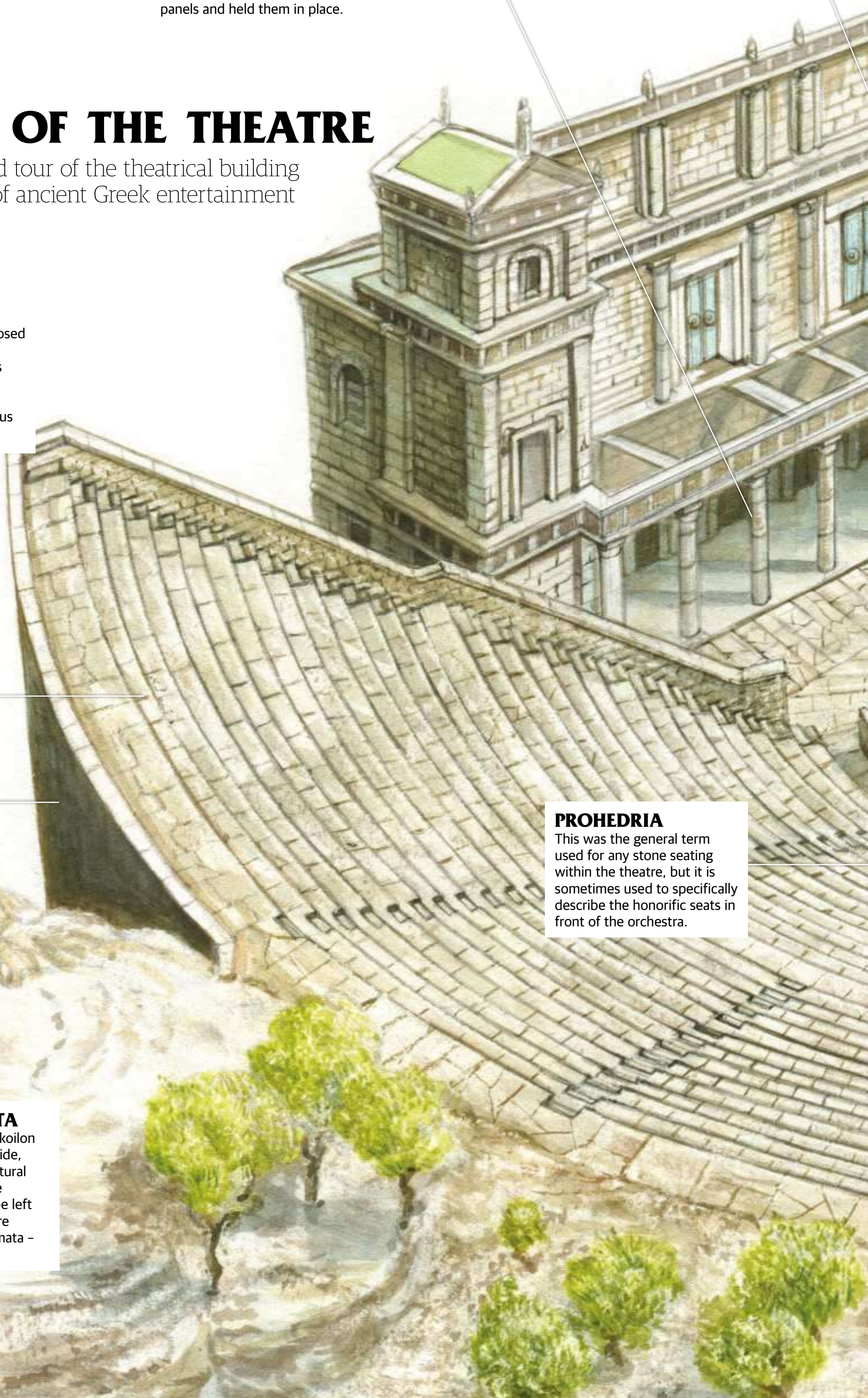
WITH THE invention of tragedies in the late-6th century BCE, comedies in the 5th century BCE and the satyr play tragicomedies around the 1st century BCE, the ancient Greeks had to build a huge number of impressive theatres to do their plays justice. As the centuries went on - and the popularity of the theatre grew and grew - the buildings had to expand and adapt to meet the demand. Indeed, many of these semicircular amphitheatres could seat well over 10,000 people and were used frequently during religious festivals such as the Dionysia, a major celebration centred around the god Dionysus.

While the theatres of the ancient Greeks began as simple clearings with a smattering of wooden benches for the audience to sit on, before long they had bloomed into full-blown, sanctuary-like facilities. These included large banks of stone seats, a vast orchestra and acting area, a complex backstage network of rooms, entrances and trapdoors, as well as a wide selection of ornate and decorative scenic backdrops. These features, along with the ancient Greeks' love for festivals, led theatres to take a central role in cementing and spreading Greek culture - something the Romans would later readily adopt for themselves.

Theatres were made primarily out of stone, often with the amphitheatre's seats placed into the side of a hill for extra support, while traditional construction methods for civic buildings and temples were transferred for the production of colonnades, scenery and entranceways. Interestingly, the greatest technical feat in constructing many of these theatres were the excellent acoustics, with the shape and angle of the seating arrangement and materials (limestone was a popular choice, for instance) serving as acoustic traps. These would filter out low-frequency sounds like spectator chatter and enhance the high frequencies of the performers' voices.

TOUR OF THE THEATRE

Take a guided tour of the theatrical building at the heart of ancient Greek entertainment



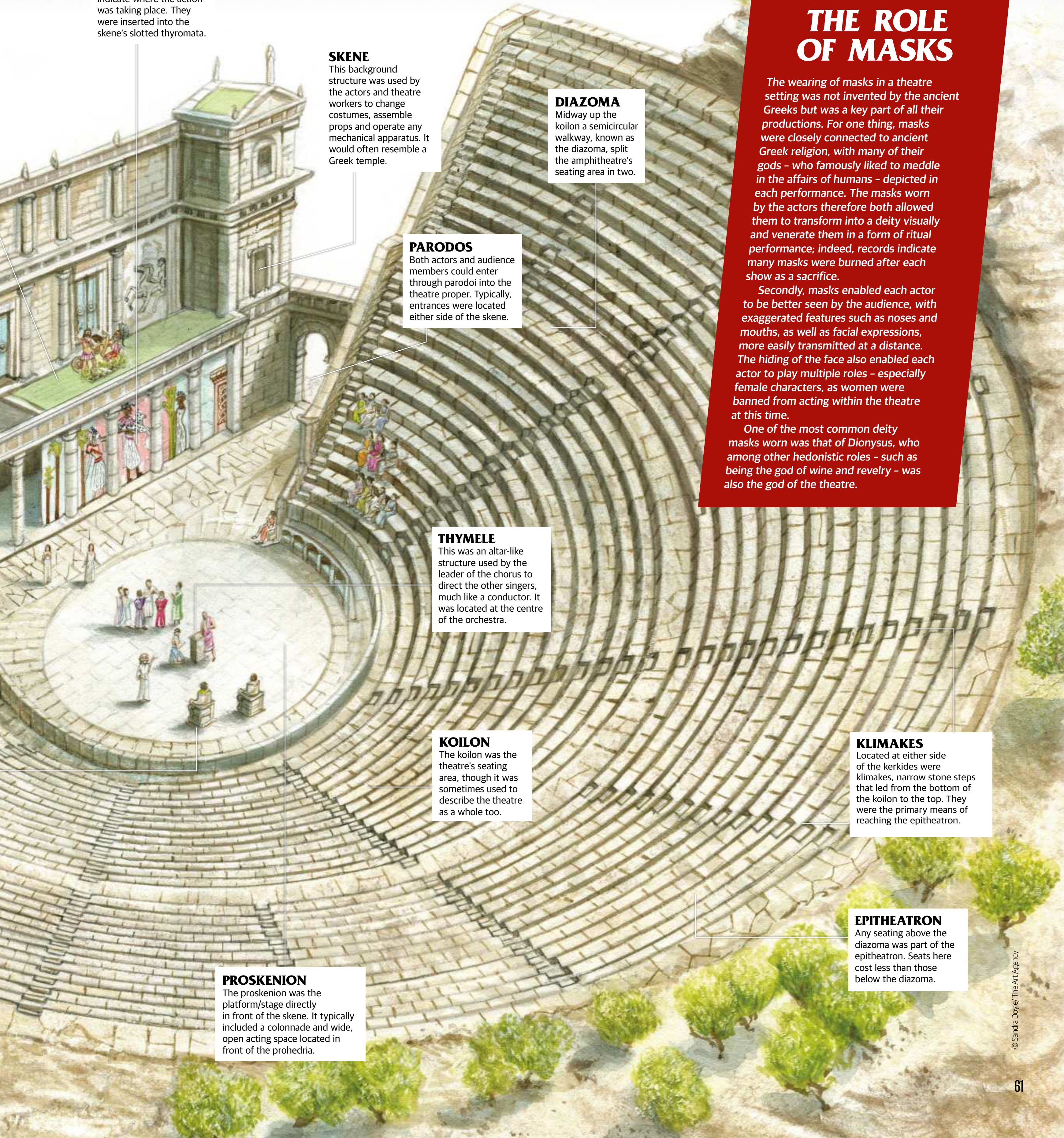
EPISKENION
The upper storey of the skene. Accessed by a ramp or stairwells, it provided an additional acting/singing space.

THYROMA
These structures were stone pillars into which vertical grooves were cut. The grooves received the painted background panels and held them in place.

KERKIS
The koilon was composed of a series of wedge-shaped seating blocks (kerkides) arranged in a semicircle. These were divided by various walkways and stairs.

PROHEDRIA
This was the general term used for any stone seating within the theatre, but it is sometimes used to specifically describe the honorific seats in front of the orchestra.

ANALEMMATA
Often the theatre's koilon was built into a hillside, which acted as a natural brace. However, the outer edges could be left exposed and so were secured by analemmata – i.e. retaining walls.



PINAKES
Pinakes were the painted wooden panels used as changeable backdrops to indicate where the action was taking place. They were inserted into the skene's slotted thyromata.

SKENE
This background structure was used by the actors and theatre workers to change costumes, assemble props and operate any mechanical apparatus. It would often resemble a Greek temple.

DIAZOMA
Midway up the koilon a semicircular walkway, known as the diazoma, split the amphitheatre's seating area in two.

PARODOS
Both actors and audience members could enter through parodoi into the theatre proper. Typically, entrances were located either side of the skene.

THYMELE
This was an altar-like structure used by the leader of the chorus to direct the other singers, much like a conductor. It was located at the centre of the orchestra.

KOILON
The koilon was the theatre's seating area, though it was sometimes used to describe the theatre as a whole too.

KLIMAKES
Located at either side of the kerkides were klimakes, narrow stone steps that led from the bottom of the koilon to the top. They were the primary means of reaching the epitheatron.

EPITHEATRON
Any seating above the diazoma was part of the epitheatron. Seats here cost less than those below the diazoma.

PROSKENION
The proskenion was the platform/stage directly in front of the skene. It typically included a colonnade and wide, open acting space located in front of the prohedria.

© Sandra Doyle/ The Art Agency

THE ROLE OF MASKS

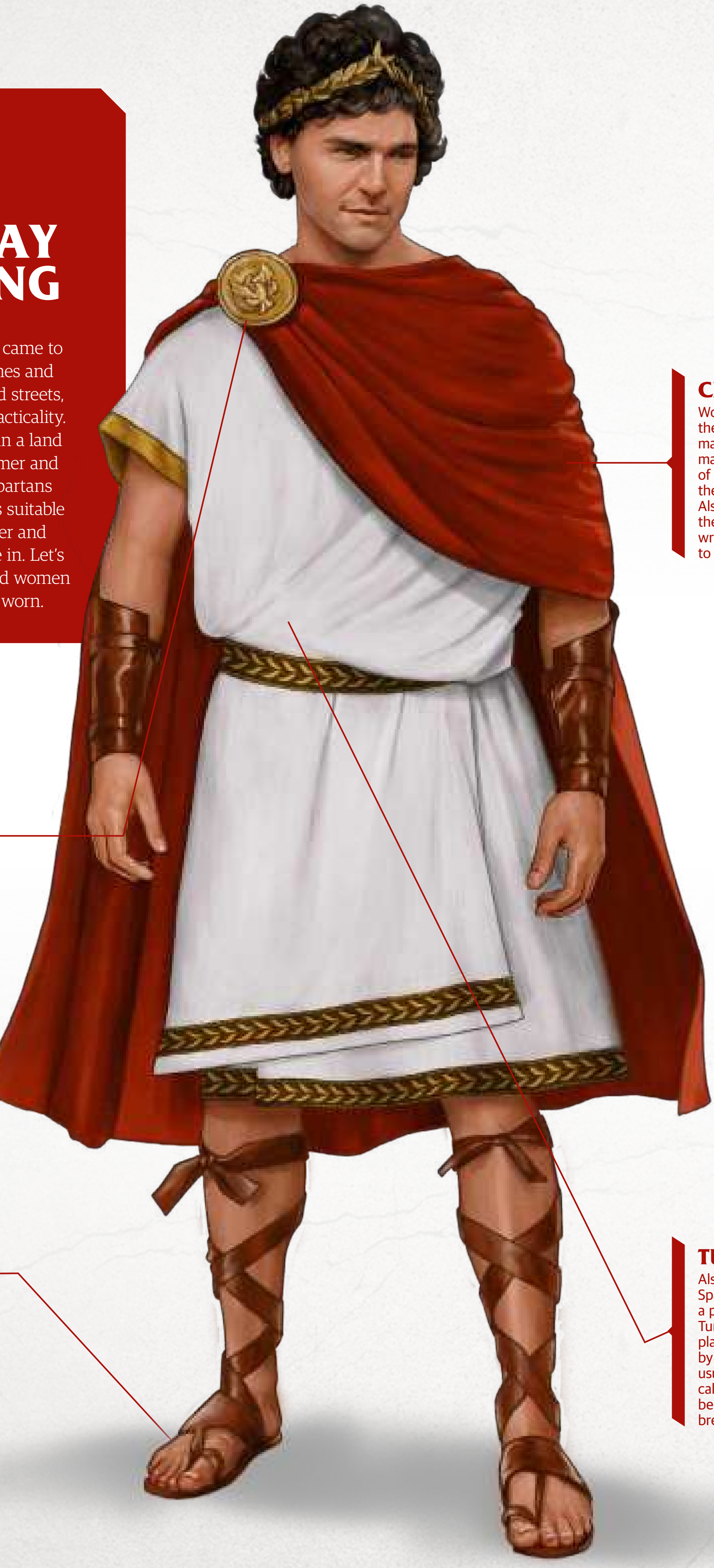
The wearing of masks in a theatre setting was not invented by the ancient Greeks but was a key part of all their productions. For one thing, masks were closely connected to ancient Greek religion, with many of their gods – who famously liked to meddle in the affairs of humans – depicted in each performance. The masks worn by the actors therefore both allowed them to transform into a deity visually and venerate them in a form of ritual performance; indeed, records indicate many masks were burned after each show as a sacrifice.

Secondly, masks enabled each actor to be better seen by the audience, with exaggerated features such as noses and mouths, as well as facial expressions, more easily transmitted at a distance. The hiding of the face also enabled each actor to play multiple roles – especially female characters, as women were banned from acting within the theatre at this time.

One of the most common deity masks worn was that of Dionysus, who among other hedonistic roles – such as being the god of wine and revelry – was also the god of the theatre.

EVERYDAY CLOTHING

It's fair to say that when it came to donning their finest clothes and strutting down the cobbled streets, Spartans were all about practicality. Having made their home in a land that scorched in the summer and shivered in the winter, Spartans ensured their clothing was suitable for the prevailing weather and flexible enough to exercise in. Let's take a look at what men and women of the time would have worn.

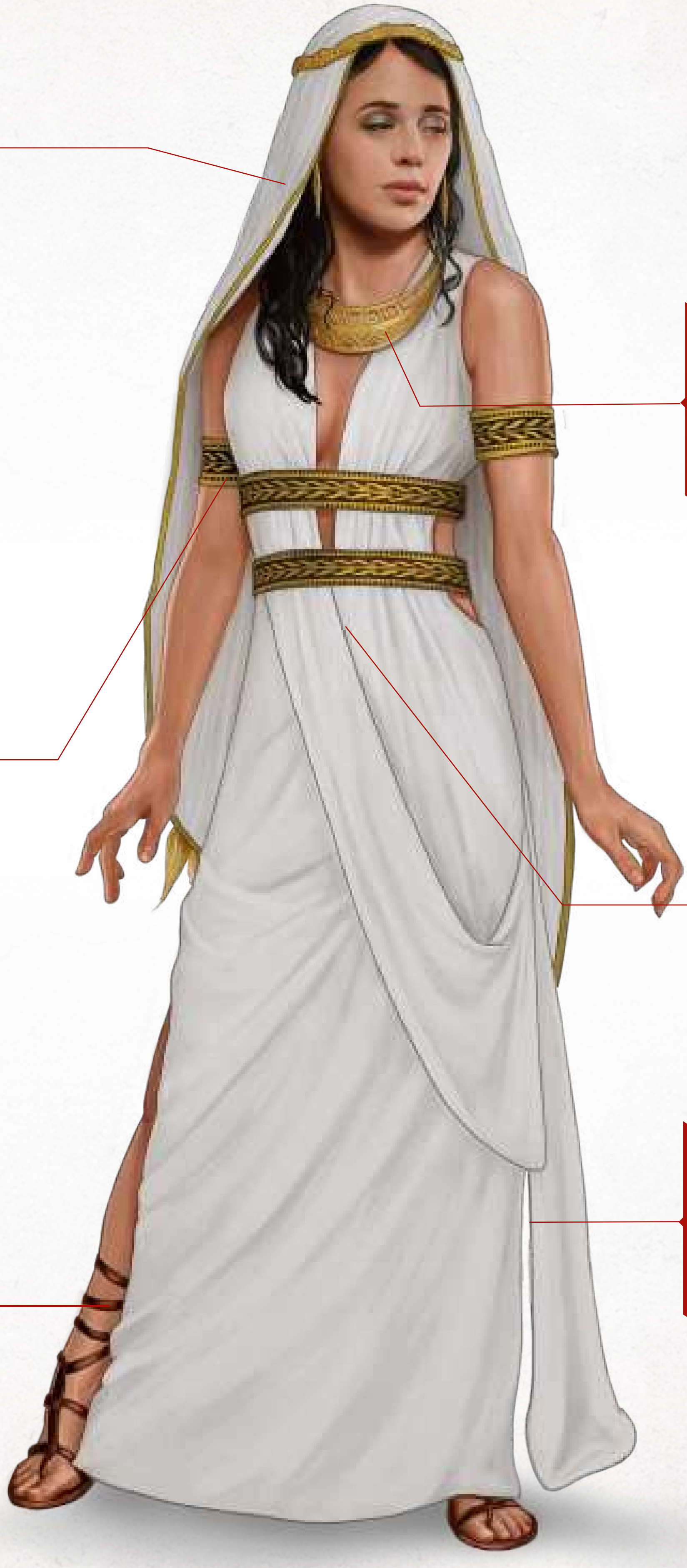


CHLAMYS
Worn over the shoulders, the cloak of a Spartan man would have been made from a rectangle of wool approximately the size of a blanket. Also worn in battle, the chlamys could be wrapped around the arm to act as a shield.

FIBULA
In order to secure the chlamys in place, a fibula, or brooch, was used. These were usually fashioned from bronze and featured a wide range of elaborate engravings.

LACONIAN BOOTS
These leather boots were open-toed in design, thereby providing greater movement for the wearer and helping to keep the feet cool during the blistering summer months.

TUNIC
Also known as a chiton, Spartan tunics were cut from a piece of wool or linen. Tunics could be fastened in place with a pin, buttons or by sewing, and they were usually supported by a belt called a zoster, which could be worn just below the breast or around the waist.



VEIL

Married Spartan women were required to wear a head veil, which would have been made from a soft material similar to their peplos. Decorative borders of different shapes, colours and lengths were often added, possibly as a sign of wealth.

JEWELLERY

Bronze jewellery ranging from intricate bracelets to sloping necklaces and earrings were all the rage among wealthier Spartan ladies. Rings also commonly adorned the fingers of women of the time.

ARMBANDS

As additional evidence of their status, women often sported metal armbands. Thighbands, wreaths and diadems were also popular ornaments to wear.

PEPLOS

Made from a thin, soft fabric, the peplos was girded at the waist to keep it in place. Like the chlamys sported by men, the peplos was pinned at the shoulders.

BARE NECESSITY

Spartan women were renowned for the slits cut into the thighs of their dresses. Designed to allow for improved mobility, this fashion statement resulted in other Greeks deriding Spartan women as 'phainomērídes', meaning 'thigh showers'.

SANDALS

All Spartan women wore sandals or boots. Shaped for practicality, they were cut from leather and open-toed for flexibility and keeping cool.

SPARTAN BLACK BROTH

A HEARTY SOUP FIT TO FEED A SPARTAN ARMY

© Thinkstock

FOOD FOR the Spartan warrior was all about practicality, and as such the black broth of the marching forces was not about taste so much as sustenance. Made with pigs' blood and offal, it may not sound like the most appetising of meals and almost certainly didn't include a lot of additional seasoning to make it more palatable, but it would have offered plenty of protein and calories for the hard-working hoplites. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your point of view), exact recipes from this time do not appear to exist. However, variations of blood soups continue to be made around the world, and there are Mediterranean styles that are probably not so different from what the Spartans might have enjoyed (if that's the right word).

We've cobbled together something that shouldn't be far off the real thing, but with some added flavour to make it more appetising.

INGREDIENTS

- 500g of pork offal (or sliced bacon/pork belly, pork mince if preferred)
- 300ml pork blood (or black pudding and water mixed in food processor)
- 250ml white vinegar
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 100g barley
- 1 1/2 tbsp of brown sugar
- 1 stock cube (pork or beef)
- 200ml water
- Bay leaf
- Salt and pepper to season

METHOD

01 In a deep pan, heat up the olive oil and then sauté the onions until soft, which should take 4-5 minutes. Add the garlic around 4 minutes in (this will stop it overcooking) so that it becomes fragrant.

02 Add pork products, whether offal or some mixture of pork cuts and cook with the onions and garlic until they start to brown, stirring regularly.

03 Add the water, vinegar, stock cube and bay leaf and bring to the boil. Then add the barley, cover the pot and allow to simmer on a low heat for 15 minutes. This should be plenty of time for the barley to cook through and soften.

04 Now it's time to add the blood or black pudding mixture. Pour in gradually and continually stir to avoid the liquid coagulating (the vinegar already in the pot should help to prevent this as well). Cook for an additional 10 minutes until the mixture begins to thicken.

05 Stir in the sugar until it has completely dissolved and then season with salt and pepper to taste.

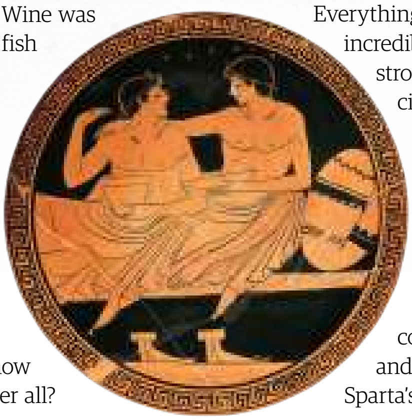
06 Be sure to take out the bay leaf before serving piping hot black broth to your guests.

EATING OUT IN ANCIENT SPARTA

SPARTANS WERE WARRIORS, BORN AND BRED TO DEFEND THEIR HOMELAND - BUT HOW WERE THEY FED?

THROUGHOUT GREECE, food was an indulgence. Wine was enthusiastically consumed alongside plenty of meat, fish and vegetables in Athens, Corinth and Thebes. But then there was Sparta, whose attitude to food was downright, well, Spartan.

While most Greeks enjoyed lavish diets, the Spartans' was much more basic, with pretty much every item of food locally sourced and nothing ever wasted. Hunters brought back wild boar and rabbits, while farmers tended to droves of pigs and flocks of sheep and goats. Vegetables and grains were grown locally, along with fresh fruit like figs. Sparta was self-sufficient, and it took pride in that - how could a city of soldiers rely on elsewhere for food, after all?



Everything was enjoyed in moderation - gluttony was incredibly un-Spartan. The point of food was to become strong and healthy, not for pleasure, and overweight citizens would find themselves publicly ridiculed and sometimes banished. The consumption of wine was also closely watched. While it was popular and enjoyed with most meals, wine was heavily watered down as inebriation was actively discouraged.

For the soldiers themselves, sparse rations were doled out in military dining halls and usually made up of rye bread, cheese and salted meat. Meanwhile, common meals, called pheiditia, took place in public and consisted of mandatory monthly contributions from Sparta's citizens.

MEAT & FISH

Sourced from close to the city-state, meat and fish were mainstays of the Spartan diet. A wide variety was consumed, from domestic pigs and sheep to wild boar and rabbits.

CROPS

Priding themselves on self-sufficiency, the Spartans grew their own crops, including grains, and barley was grown for bread.

FRUIT AND VEG

Fruit and vegetables were a key part of any Spartan's diet. Thanks to the warm Mediterranean climate, figs were very common, as were pomegranates and raisins.

DAIRY

With sheep and goats kept by Spartan farmers, there was no shortage of milk. It was usually used to make cheese and cream, both of which were enjoyed by the Spartans.

BREAD

While bread wasn't as common in Sparta as it was in other Greek city-states, it was still made and consumed. It was usually made of barley instead of wheat, but wheat bread was made for special occasions.

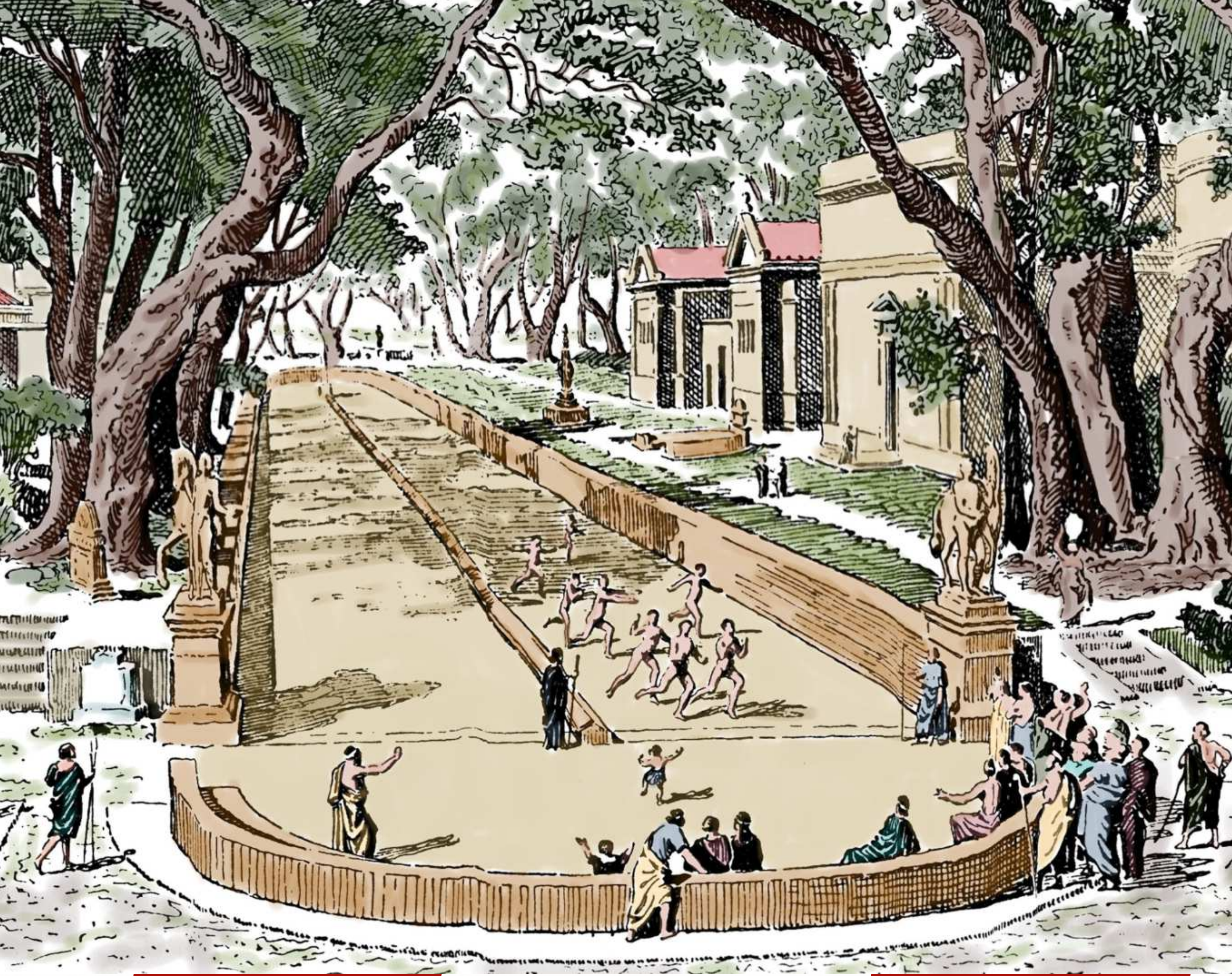
WINE

As in many ancient civilisations, wine was common, but drunkenness was highly discouraged and so it was heavily watered down. Slaves were often forced to get drunk to warn children off the drink's effects.

SPORTS IN ANCIENT SPARTA

UNDERTAKEN BOTH FOR FUN AND TO SERVE A HIGHER PURPOSE, WE LOOK AT HOW SPARTANS KEPT THEMSELVES OCCUPIED WHEN NOT AT WAR

WORDS BY ◆ **STEVE WRIGHT**



PRETTY MUCH a warrior state in all but name, virtually every aspect of life in Sparta was geared towards ensuring its dominance on the battlefield. From a young age its citizens were turned towards a military lifestyle, and women were encouraged to stay healthy for the purpose of producing strong future warriors.

It is unsurprising, then, that the Spartans put such high stock in the participation in physical activity. As well as aiding them in sculpting their bodies into the perfect fighting machines, it gave them a chance to showcase their superiority to their fellow city-states. While war was never far away, they couldn't be fighting all the time, and they needed a separate outlet.

First held in 776 BCE, the ancient Olympic Games provided the perfect platform for Sparta to test its mettle. With contests of speed, strength and endurance, it would have been meat and drink to the Spartans, and they participated with gusto, producing their own tales and legends in the process.

But it wasn't just competitive sports in which Spartans showcased their athletic side. Dancing provided the basis for rituals and ceremonies to be conducted, while hunting helped them hone the abilities that would come into play in the wars to come. If it involved some form of strenuous physical activity, the Spartans likely saw value in it.

With this in mind, we look at the activities that the Spartans took part in, which was for them the closest they would get to recreational time, and the role they played in their society.

CHIONIS OF SPARTA

Known to be active from 664 BCE through to 656 BCE, Chionis was a Spartan athlete who covered both himself and his native city-state in glory due to his sporting prowess.

Recognised as the first individual to come out on top in the stadion event three years in a row (at the 29th, 30th and 31st Olympic Games), he also notched up consecutive triple victories in the diaulos and state events in the same years and attained a highly impressive long jump distance of seven metres and five centimetres. This was followed up by a similarly impressive showing in the triple jump, with accounts claiming a distance of 15.85 metres (52 feet).

It was nearly 200 years before his achievements were matched, but it mattered not; he had earned his place in history as an exemplifier of Spartan physical prowess, glory and achievement.

An excavated example of a Spartan shield

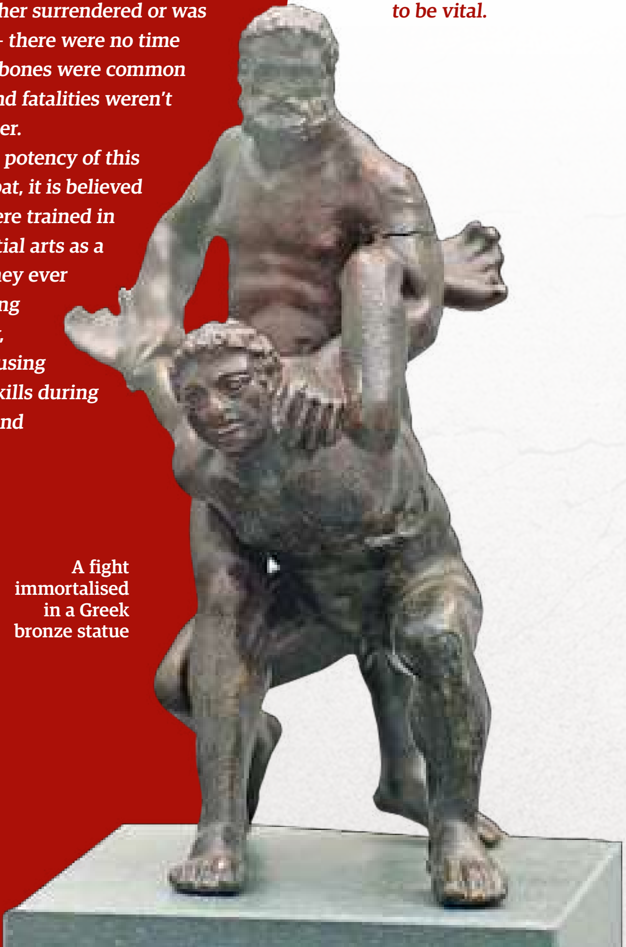
PANKRATION

If you are of the belief that MMA is a bit too mellow, then pankration may have been for you. A mash-up of wrestling and boxing (with kicking also permissible, because why not), it was performed all over Greece, having been introduced into the Olympic Games in 648 BCE, but it was especially popular in Sparta.

The word 'pankration' literally translates in Greece as 'all powers' - an apt description as it turned out, as pretty much anything was allowed. Only biting and eye gouging were banned, but in Sparta even these not exactly stringent rules were relaxed.

Contestants, known as pankratists, would complete their bouts in a wrestling pit, naked and covered in oil, with the referee using a rod to enforce the rules. Fights ended only when one combatant either surrendered or was incapacitated - there were no time limits. Broken bones were common occurrences, and fatalities weren't unheard of either.

Such was the potency of this method of combat, it is believed that Spartans were trained in this form of martial arts as a backup should they ever be disarmed during battle. Reportedly, many resorted to using their pankration skills during the famous last stand at Thermopylae.

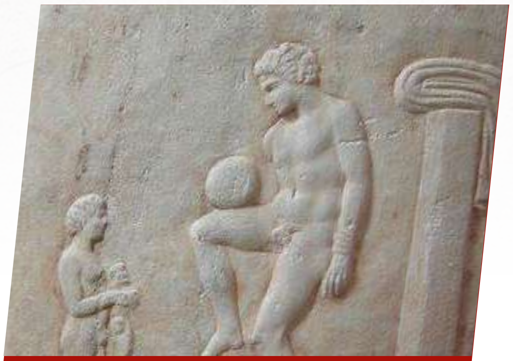


A fight immortalised in a Greek bronze statue

SHIELD WARS

Pretty much the opposite of a tug-of-war, shields were generally a test of strength and endurance, often contested by two Spartan hoplites. Standing opposite each other, the aim of the game, so to speak, was for the two contestants to push at each other with their shields until one had been shoved over a line. At no point was anyone allowed to pull their shield back and subsequently ram their opponent; the entire bout had to be decided purely by physical brute force and nothing else.

While also a good test of endurance and physical prowess for Spartan soldiers, it also fed into their battle plans. Shield walls were an important aspect of Spartan battle tactics, and the ability to wield a shield effectively was considered to be vital.



EPISKYROS

A ball game popular in the younger sections of Spartan society, episkyros saw two teams attempting to drive each other across a boundary via a thrown ball.

An account by Pollux describes the rules as follows: teams of equal numbers stand opposite each other, marking out a line between them with stone chips (known as the skuros), where the ball is placed. Then two other lines are marked out behind each team. The team with the ball throws it to their opponents, who then hurls it back until one side pushed the other over the line.

The ball was deliberately very light and difficult to handle so that it couldn't be thrown to the opposing team straight away. Feet could also be used, both men and women could play, and, as usual in Sparta, all contestants competed entirely in the nude.

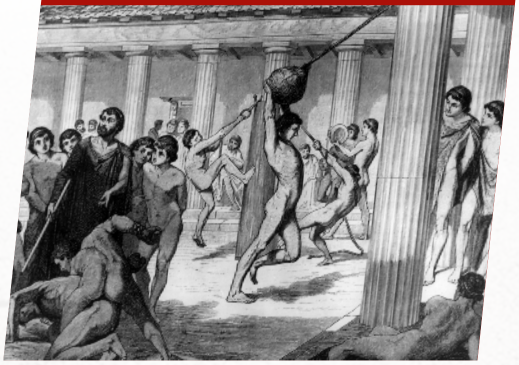
While this wasn't especially popular among the warriors in Spartan society, it was commonplace among women and children, fulfilling the Spartan mandate of everyone participating in physical activity as much as possible.

TRACK AND FIELD

The history of track and field events is tied in directly with that of Sparta itself. You could even say that the first unofficial track and field event took place there in reference to Herodotus' account of Pheidippides' 149-mile dash from Marathon to Sparta in 490 BCE to deliver news of a victory against the Persians.

As regular participants in the Olympic Games, the Spartans would have been regular competitors in the assortment of track and field events held there. Some of these will be familiar (discus, javelin and long jump forming three-fifths of the pentathlon) while others less so (stadion, diaulos and dolichos).

Stadion was a 200-yard (180-metre) sprint taking place in the titular stadium. Diaulos was a longer route, believed to be about 400 metres (although since the length depended on the size of the stadium, this could have been longer in places) and may have included turning posts. Finally, the dolichos (meaning 'long race') lived up to its name; believed to be about 4,800 metres (three miles) long, it started in the stadium before branching out and taking in the surrounding area.



DANCING

Another popular pastime of the Spartans (Homer described the city as a "broad dancing place"), dancing gave the people of Sparta further opportunity to showcase their physical prowess among their fellow citizens.

One such event in which they did this was the yearly Gymnopaedia, during which both youths and later adults performed war dances in honour of the gods Apollo, Artemis and Leto. Considered a rite of passage among citizens, all of Spartan society was encouraged to participate.

Types of war dancing included the Pyrrhicios (Pyrrhic dance). Practised throughout Greece, it was especially popular in Sparta, where it was considered to be light war training and thus taught to children.

As well as for the purpose of physical recreation, women were encouraged to take up dancing. They were required to keep healthy for the purpose of producing strong Spartan babies, so this became a frequent pastime.

A depiction of pyrrhic dancing

When not at war, Spartans often turned to hunting

HUNTING

When the Spartans weren't at war, hunting proved to be a decent substitute, since there was a social stigma around anyone in Sparta not involved in warfare as a career. In addition to hunting for economic reasons, such as for food and pelts to trade (although they would leave the task of utilising the animal skins for these purposes to slaves), like many activities within Spartan society, hunting was all part of a great sporting tradition, one aimed at promoting the virtues of competition and physical fitness.

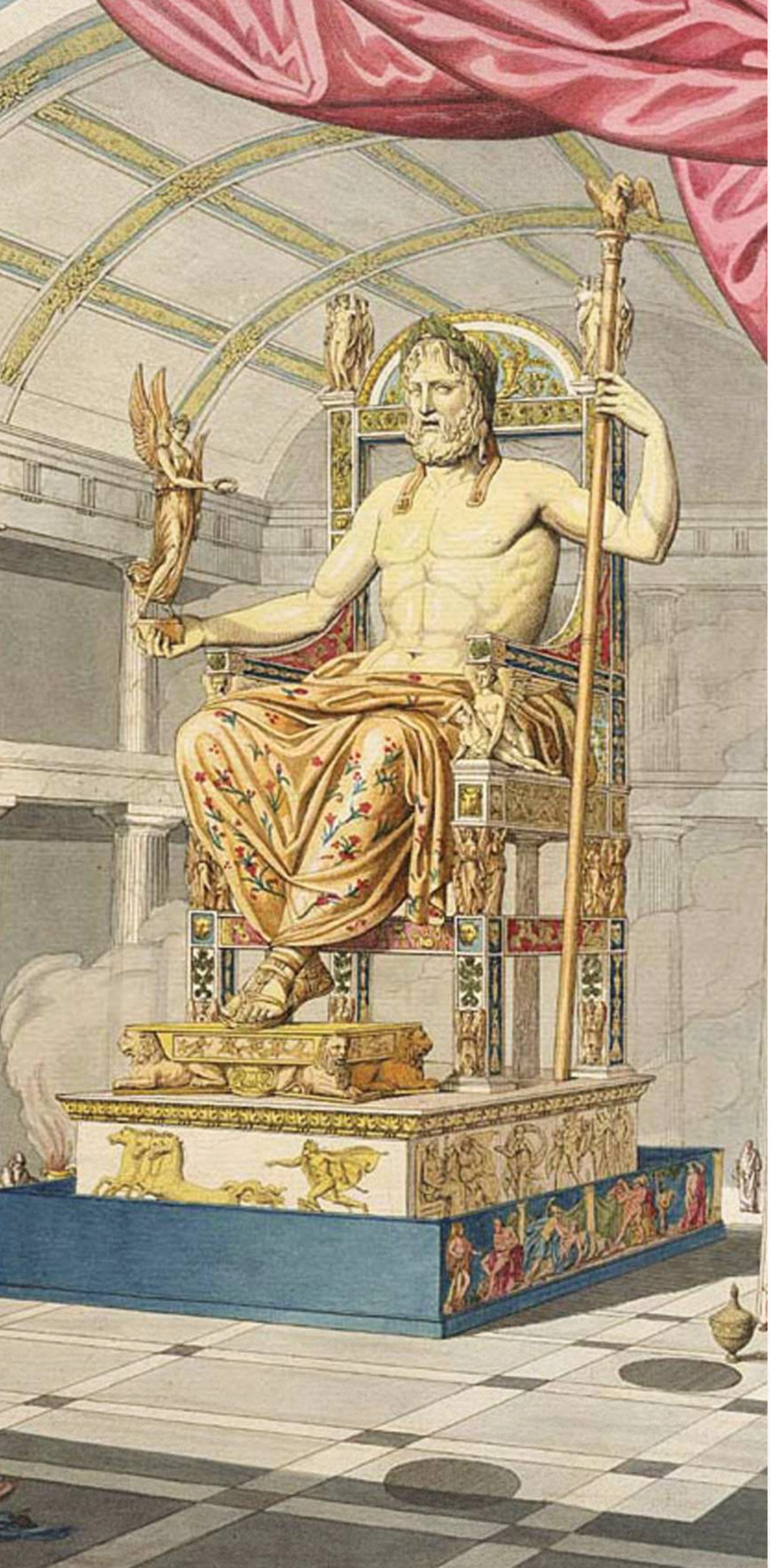
The hunters would often require the aid of whoever was to hand: whether this be horses, Laconian hounds (a breed used primarily for their speed and adeptness in the hunt), Locrian hounds (particularly effective against wild boar) or Helot slaves. Even so, they weren't utilised when it mattered; kills were to be made up close and personal, one on one, emphasising the spirit of competition.

Wild boars were quite often targets, and Central Taygetus, the highest area of the mountain range, considered the best hunting area for Spartans to prove their mettle. Once a year, Sparta would declare war on the Helot underclass, permitting its warriors to kill them for sport.

THE ANCIENT OLYMPICS

EXPLORE THE ORIGINS OF THE OLYMPICS, FROM THE FESTIVAL, ATHLETES AND EVENTS TO THE MYTHOLOGY

Quatremère de Quincy's 1815 reconstruction of Phidias' statue of Olympian Zeus wrongly imagines it beneath an arched roof



EVERY FOUR years from 776 BCE to around 425 CE, competitors and spectators flocked to a sanctuary in southern Greece to participate in one of the most extraordinary events of the ancient world. It was a festival in honour of Zeus, king of the Greek gods, who ruled from the snow-capped peaks of Mount Olympus far to the north. Indeed, it was from Olympian Zeus that the location of the sanctuary was named: Olympia.

The festival had humble origins. In its early years, participants came mainly from Elis, the city just under 65 kilometres away that controlled the sanctuary. On the morning following the August full moon, they sang hymns, chanted prayers and sacrificed oxen to Zeus, burning the bones and fat on the altar as an offering before cooking the meat for that evening's banquet.

As the mouth-watering aromas filled the air, many of those present made their way a little to the east, stripped down to their loincloths - only from 720 BCE were competitors naked - and, while the rest looked on, raced back to the finishing line near the altar. The distance, around 180 metres, was called a 'stade', the origin of our word 'stadium'. In 30 seconds the race was over, and in 776 BCE the winner was proclaimed. He was a local baker called Coroebus, that year's only victor, for the foot race was the only contest. The Olympic Games began as one Olympic game.

So it remained for two generations, but from 724 BCE other events were introduced, and the reputation of the festival began to grow. Coincidentally, this was a time of new beginnings for the Greeks, as many mainland cities sent shiploads of citizens to plant new settlements in foreign lands from Marseilles in the west to Byzantium in the east, and from Cyrene in Libya to Epidamnus in Albania.

As the Greek footprint expanded, Greeks felt a growing need to maintain, or create, a cultural identity. The 5th-century-BCE historian Herodotus writes that what united them was "kinship in blood and speech, the shrines of gods, the sacrifices that we have in common, and the similarity of our lifestyle". He might have added 'competitiveness', because inspiring almost every Greek was the advice given to Achilles in the *Iliad*, a poem with its roots in the 8th century BCE, like the Olympics: "Always to be best and to surpass all others".

As the *Iliad*, with its tales of bravery culminating in funeral games for Patroclus, was fuelling the Greeks' imaginations, the setting where they could locate themselves as the true heirs of the heroes of the Trojan War was fast becoming recognised as Olympia and, although other sports-related festivals sprang up – notably at Delphi, Corinth and Nemea – the Olympics reigned supreme. By the 6th century BCE, competitors were arriving from all over the Greek world and, when in the early 5th century mainland Greeks successfully fought off the Persian invasions while Sicilian Greeks defeated the Carthaginians and Etruscans, it was at Olympia that they made their offerings of thanks.

As the festival's status grew, the Games expanded to cover five days. At the same time, new opportunities to display power through sacrifice and banquets meant that Olympia was now attracting not just athletes but the rich and influential, as well as kings and politicians eager to strut the international stage, hold high-level conferences and negotiate high-profile deals. Many were keen to compete in the chariot race, the Games' most expensive event. Among them was Alexander I, king of Macedon, whose people many considered not to be pure Greeks. In 504 BCE, he successfully proved his eligibility by tracing his ancestors back to the Peloponnesian city of Argos. Almost a century later in 416 BCE, the Athenian playboy politician Alcibiades too used the Olympic chariot race to proclaim his wealth and power by entering an unrivalled seven teams. Unsurprisingly he won, and to celebrate he entertained the spectators to a banquet, paid for in part by his wealthy backers from the Aegean islands of Chios and Lesbos.

Meanwhile, as the numbers of attendees swelled, others were attracted, too: not just merchants hoping to make valuable sales, but writers such as Herodotus, who read his *Histories* from the portico of Zeus' temple; artists such as Zeuxis, the inventor of trompe l'oeil, who wafted round Olympia in a cloak advertising his name in golden letters; and poets like the praise-singer Pindar, eager to win commissions from victorious athletes.

Although the far-seeing orator Isocrates used the panhellenic gathering to make heartfelt pleas for Greek unity in the face of strong aggressors, they fell on deaf ears. At the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, Philip II of Macedon defeated the mainland Greek states and marked his victory by erecting his 'Philippeion' – a round temple containing statues of himself and his family – at Olympia next to the Temple of Hera, wife of Zeus.

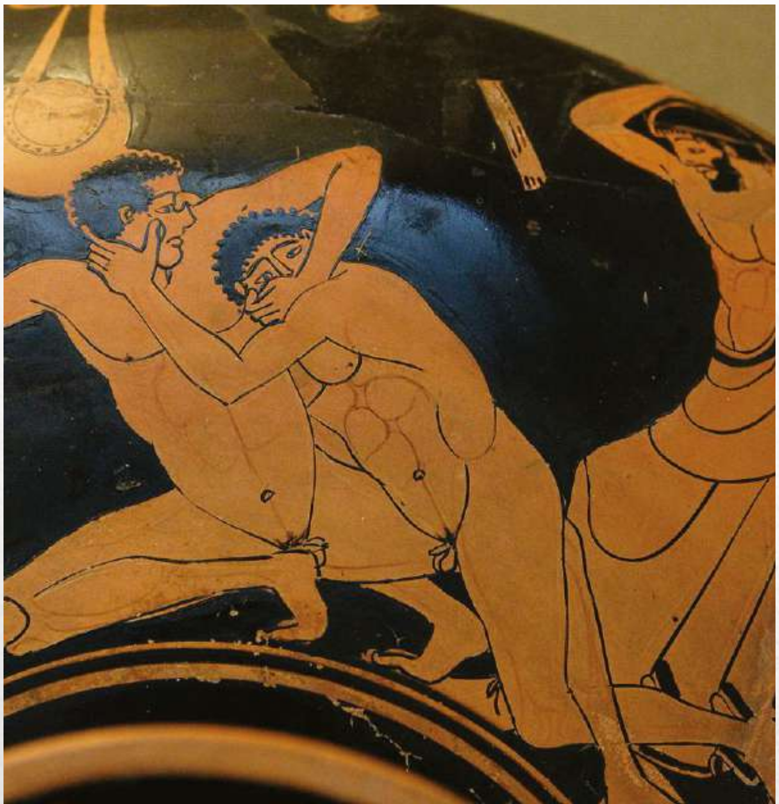
Under the Roman Empire, the Olympics continued to thrive, though occasionally an emperor might bend the rules. In 67 CE, for example, Nero not only rescheduled the Games to allow him to take part, he also tried to show his prowess by driving his own ten-horse chariot. But nothing went to plan. His biographer Suetonius records: "He fell from his chariot and was helped back in, but he could not continue and gave up before the end. Even so he won the victor's crown."

At last Christianity put paid to the Olympic Festival – after all, it was in honour of a pagan god. Outlawed in 391 CE by the Christian emperor Theodosius, the Olympics struggled on for another 30 years, however, by 425 CE the Games were no more.

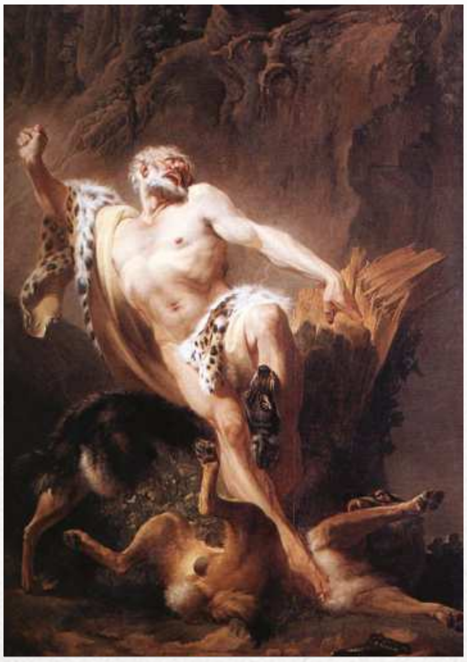
All classical accounts of the Olympics' origins involved mythology. Some maintained that it was at Olympia that Zeus defeated his father Cronus and assumed control of gods and mortals. Others claimed that Heracles established the first Games to celebrate his victory over the local king, Augeas, who had refused to pay the hero for one of his 12 labours, cleansing the royal stables.

Still others disagreed on the festival's beginnings. For them, the founder of the Games was Pelops, an Ionian prince from Phocaea (modern Foça in Turkey). Learning that the wealthy Greek king Oenomaeus was offering his daughter, Hippodamia, in marriage to whomever beat him in a chariot race,

"OLYMPIA WAS NOW ATTRACTING NOT JUST ATHLETES BUT THE RICH AND INFLUENTIAL"



Devotees of the most brutal of sport, pankratists break the rules forbidding biting and eye-gouging



Pelops was determined to win. Even though he possessed a team of magical horses, a gift from the god Poseidon, he took no chances. He bribed the chariot technician, Myrtilus, to remove the lynch pins from Oenomaeus' wheels and substitute them with wax replicas. As the wheels rotated ever faster, the friction made these lynch pins melt; the chariot collapsed and Oenomaeus was dragged to an excruciating death. However, instead of honouring his side of the agreement (to let Myrtilus sleep with Hippodamia), Pelops threw him off a cliff. But Myrtilus' ghost haunted Pelops, and the only way he could appease it was by performing funeral games – the first Olympic Games.

The influence of all three foundation myths were felt at Olympia. Dominating the Altis was the magnificent Temple of Zeus, within whose incense-laden inner chamber was a stunning statue of the seated god wearing the olive crown, awarded to victorious athletes. Created in a specially built onsite workshop by the Athenian sculptor Phidias, it was 12 metres high and faced in gold and ivory, the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World located on Greek soil. Such was its numinous beauty that even the 2nd-century-CE Stoic philosopher Epictetus enthused that "people would consider it a great misfortune to die without ever seeing it". Transported to Constantinople by rapacious Romans, the statue was destroyed by fire in 462 CE, but we can still appreciate its power: Byzantine iconographers used it as their model for the face of God.

Meanwhile, not far from Zeus' temple to the north, Pelops' grave mound was the site of one of the festival's most solemn ceremonies, when a black ram was sacrificed to the dead hero, while Heracles, said to be the first to make this sacrifice, was praised for something altogether more prosaic. Legend told that thanks to his sacrifice to the very specifically named Zeus 'who banishes flies', Zeus Apomuios, he caused Olympia to be fly-free.

Spectators had good reason to be thankful, especially since the Games were celebrated

THE SANCTUARY OF OLYMPIA IN THE 2ND CENTURY

Bristling with statues of victorious athletes, Olympia was dominated by religious buildings like the temples of Zeus and Hera, as well as Pelops' grave-mound

Philippeion
Built to commemorate Philip II's victory in battle, this exquisite rotunda housed statues not of gods, but of the Macedonian royal family.

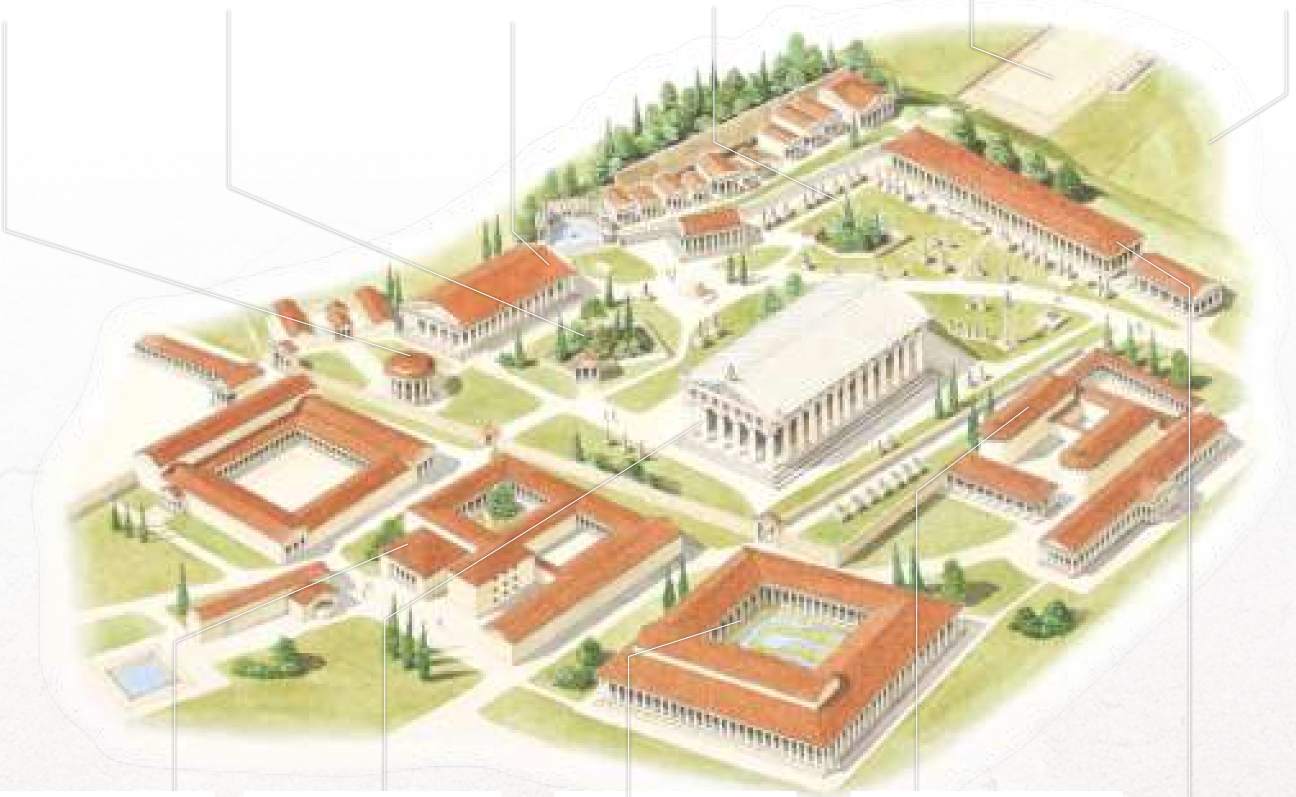
Grave mound of Pelops
Surrounded by white poplar trees, here, beneath the August full moon, priests slaughtered a black ram, letting its blood soak the earth for the hero's ghost to drink.

Temple of Hera
This 7th-century-BCE temple housed an archaic statue of the seated goddess with Zeus standing beside her, and the 'Discus of Iphitus', inscribed with the terms of the Olympic Truce.

Zanes statues
Overlooked by a row of temple-like treasuries, the statues were paid for from fines on cheating competitors, named and shamed on bases that still survive today.

Stadium
Races on the packed-earth track, 180m in length (the distance the Greeks called a 'stade'), were watched by spectators standing on the manmade mound surrounding three sides.

To Hippodrome
The 180m-long Hippodrome, scene of the thrilling horse- and chariot-races, was an elliptical race track. Buried in silt by the flooding River Alpheus, its site was not rediscovered until 2008.



Phidias' Workshop
An exact replica of the interior of Zeus' Temple (save for the addition of windows), Phidias created the god's gold and ivory sculpture here before assembling it in situ.

Temple of Zeus
Adorned with exterior sculptures showing mythological scenes, the temple housed a 12m-high seated statue of Zeus faced in gold and ivory, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Leonidaion
73m square and constructed between 330 and 320 BCE by Leonidas of Naxos, this proto-hotel featured a central courtyard with fragrant shrubs and splashing fountains.

Bouleuterion
In this complex of two apsidal buildings flanking a central chamber with a colonnaded frontage, the Olympic Council met, presided over by a forbidding statue of Zeus Horkios ('Zeus, Oath God').

Stoa of the Echoes
This stoa (portico), 90m long, was begun in the mid 4th century BCE. Excellent acoustics made it the ideal setting for contests between trumpeters.

The Philippeion, commemorating Philip II's victory over Greece, housed statues of Macedon's royal family

in the scorching heat of August, when conditions could be horrendous. For the five days surrounding the new moon, those tens of thousands of spectators, who could not afford to stay at the Leonidaion - a 'hotel' built by a far-sighted entrepreneur in 360 BCE - pitched tents or slept rough with little running water and no sanitation. For some, such as Epictetus, the abiding memory was "the sunburn and the filth… the cacophony, the din, the jostling, the shoving, the crowding, and so many people, each absorbed in doing his own thing". However, even he admitted: "I think you're happy to put up with all of this when you think of the splendour of the spectacles."

Being a masculine religious festival in honour of dead heroes and the great god Zeus, women, with the one exception of the priestess of Demeter, were forbidden to attend the Games - though a parallel four-yearly women's festival was held at Olympia in honour of the goddess Hera. Gender was not the only restriction; no convicted murderer could enter unless they had first undergone a lengthy purification ritual, and all participants were required to speak fluent Greek. Theoretically, any free man could take part, irrespective of social status. Indeed, the flamboyant Alcibiades refused to participate in any sport except chariot racing, the preserve of the rich, because it would mean competing with people of a lower class.

The only other category involved age. There were a handful of contests for boys: boxing, wrestling, the 'stade' race and - for one year only in 628 BCE - the pentathlon. For every other competition, athletes had to be be adults over the age of 20. A month before the Games began, all were required to gather at Elis, the city that controlled the festival. Here, they were compelled to train and compete in initial heats under the stern watch of the Hellanodikai, or 'Judges of the Greeks', while they decided who should compete in which event.

It was now, too, that age categories were decided, something that without supporting documentation could be very sensitive. Sometimes, judgements were controversial. In 468 BCE, Pherias of Aegina was prevented from taking part in the men's wrestling because he looked too young. Another contestant, Nicasylos of Rhodes, was so well-developed that he was made to wrestle as an adult even though he was only 18. He won his match, as well as others elsewhere, but so brutal were the contests that he died at 20.

It was participants in contact sports who attracted the greatest interest and controversy. Perhaps the most famous was the wrestler Milo, victorious at five successive Olympics over 20 years. Stories about his strength were numerous, and when a neighbouring city attacked his hometown of Croton in south Italy, Milo dressed in a lion skin and strode out to meet them wielding a club. Believing him to be Heracles reincarnated, the invaders fled.

Even Milo's death was sensational. The 2nd-century-Ce travel writer Pausanias reports that "somewhere in the Crotonian territory he came across a tree of dry wood split open and held with wedges. Milo decided to put his hands inside the tree, but the wedges slipped

TIMELINE

776 BCE
The first recorded Olympic Festival is held. The only contest, the stade race, is won by a local baker, Coroebus of Elis.

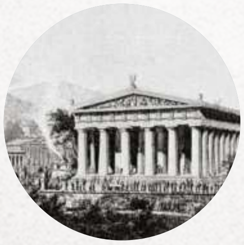
724 BCE
A second contest, the diaulos, is introduced, heralding a flurry of new events, including the pentathlon and wrestling (708 BCE), chariot racing (680 BCE) and horse racing (648 BCE).

720 BCE
After Orisippus of Megara won the stade race at the previous games, 'losing' his loincloth as he ran, athletes begin to compete naked, possibly believing that nudity made them faster.

564 BCE
Arrhichion of Phigalia wins the pankration despite being dead: his opponent, in pain from a dislocated toe, gives up just before Arrhachion dies from strangulation.

458 BCE
Local architect Libon's Temple of Zeus is completed, paid for from the spoils of war against a neighbouring city-state and adorned with sculptures showing Pelops, Apollo and Heracles.

430 BCE
Phidias of Athens (who also designed the Parthenon) completes his 13-metre-tall seated statue of Zeus, faced in gold and ivory, carrying Winged Victory in its outstretched hand.



416 BCE
Alcibiades of Athens appropriates the Games for his personal aggrandisement, entering a record seven chariots and treating all the spectators to a monstrous banquet.

and he was held fast. Then the wolves found him. These beasts are particularly abundant in the territory of Croton…"

But it was a boxer who first brought the Games into disrepute. All participants were required to meet in the Olympic Council Building to swear an oath over the body of a boar that they would not cheat. However, in 388 BCE, Eupolus of Thessaly was found to have bribed three opponents. The Hellanodikai fined all four men and with the money set up four statues of Zeus, the so-called Zanes, on the path down to the stadium, with inscriptions naming and shaming the guilty parties. The bases of 16 such Zanes can still be seen today.

A more coveted memorial was awarded to the winner of the stade race. Individual cities were usually named each year after their chief magistrate, often leading to confusion for anyone trying to compile more regional chronologies. In the late 5th century BCE, the philosopher Hippias of Elis, wishing to create a universal dating system, invented a solution. He named 776 BCE 'the year of the first Olympiad, when Coroebus of Elis won the stade', 772 BCE 'the year of the first Olympiad, when Antimachus of Elis won the stade', and so on, with the intervening years numbered accordingly 'the second, third and forth year of the Olympiad'. His system was accepted. From then on, the Greeks effectively began their historical era with the first Olympiad, and the winner of the Olympic 'stade' race and his city were immortalised throughout the Greek-speaking world.

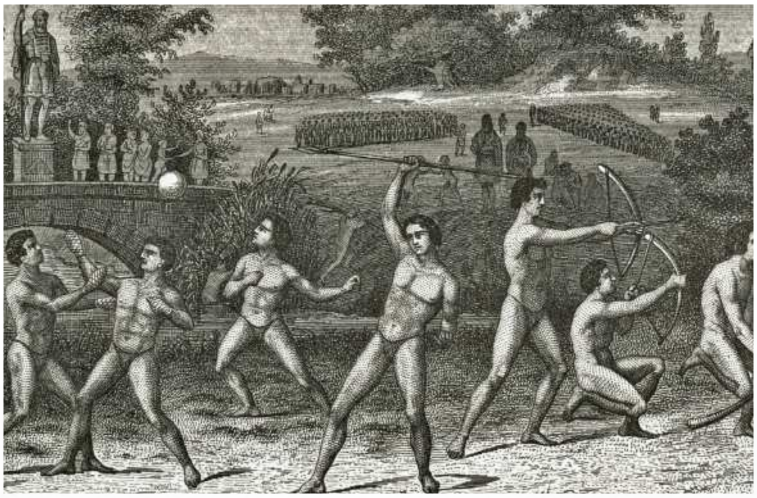
Although the stade was the first competitive event, after the introduction of the diaulos in 724 BCE others followed swiftly. Mostly these were of three types, the first being running: stade, diaulos, dolichos (4.5 kilometres), and a stade race in armour. The second consisted of trials of strength: boxing, wrestling, pankration (a deadly combination of barbaric brawling and bare-knuckle fight), as well as throwing the javelin and discus, with the third comprising equestrian sports: horse races and races for two-, four- and ten-horse chariots, as well as mule-cart races.

In addition, the pentathlon combined elements of both strength and speed. Once they were introduced, some events, such as the stade race, lasted for the entire life of the Games. Others, such as the mule-cart race, were quietly dropped.

Unlike at other international festivals, such as the Pythian Games held at Delphi in honour of Apollo or the Panathenaic Festival at Athens, the Olympics contained no formal cultural or artistic element. But there were two curious contests that had little to do with sporting prowess. Introduced in 396 BCE, the competitions for trumpeters and heralds became particularly popular when they found a new home in a colonnade built after the stadium was relocated more than 80 metres to the east of the Temple of Zeus. The acoustics of this so-called Stoa of the Echoes caused any sound to reverberate no less than seven times.

One event conspicuous by its absence is the marathon, which was inspired by an ancient Greek athletic feat. In 490 BCE, the runner Pheidippides raced to bring the news of the Greek victory over the Persians from Marathon to Athens, a distance of just over 46 kilometres. The race was created for the first modern Olympics of 1896, held not at Olympia but in Athens, the new capital of a proudly independent Greece.

This marked the dawn of a modern Olympic era, a secular event that would be largely unrecognisable to Greece's classical forefathers, not least because of their ethos. Where previously athletes had striven 'always to be best', now, as their new founder, Baron de Coubertin, proclaimed: "What is important in life is not to triumph, but to take part; what is essential is not to have won, but to have fought well."



These engraved illustrations show some of the earliest Olympic events

Scandal taints Pisodorus of Rhodes' win in the boys' boxing match when his trainer is found to be a woman – his mother – who narrowly escapes execution as punishment for attending.
388 BCE

356 BCE
Philip II of Macedon learns of his chariot victory and the birth of his son, Alexander the Great, on the same day. He would later commission a momument known as the Philippeion to commemorate his defeat of Greece.

Leonidas of Rhodes wins the stade, diaulos and hoplitodromos races, a feat he repeats in the next two Olympics. His record nine wins is broken only in 2016 by Michael Phelps.
164 BCE

40 CE
Caligula tries to remove the statue of Zeus to Rome, but his workmen refuse to continue when they hear unearthly groans emanating from inside it.

Nero builds a palace and triumphal arch near the hippodrome, 'winning' the ten-horse chariot race despite falling out and failing to complete the course.
67 CE

391 CE
With Christianity now the religion of imperial Rome, Emperor Theodosius bans all pagan worship, but the Olympic Games probably continue in some form until 425 CE.

The statue of Zeus, removed to a patrician's palace in Constantinople in 390 CE, is destroyed by fire, but it has already inspired Byzantine artists' impressions of the face of God.
462 CE

1896
Inspired by the ancient Games, English public schools and Shropshire's Much Wenlock Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin organises the first modern Olympics in Athens. The Greek Spyros Louis wins the marathon.

SPARTA AT WAR

78 WRATH OF SPARTA
With the might of all of Persia preparing to fall upon it, learn how Greece put aside its differences and united to defend democracy

84 BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE
Step into the Hot Gates and relive the greatest last stand the world has ever known

88 PELOPONNESIAN WAR
Internecine war among the Greek city-states was nothing new in 431 BCE, but the scale and ferocity with which this war was waged was without precedent

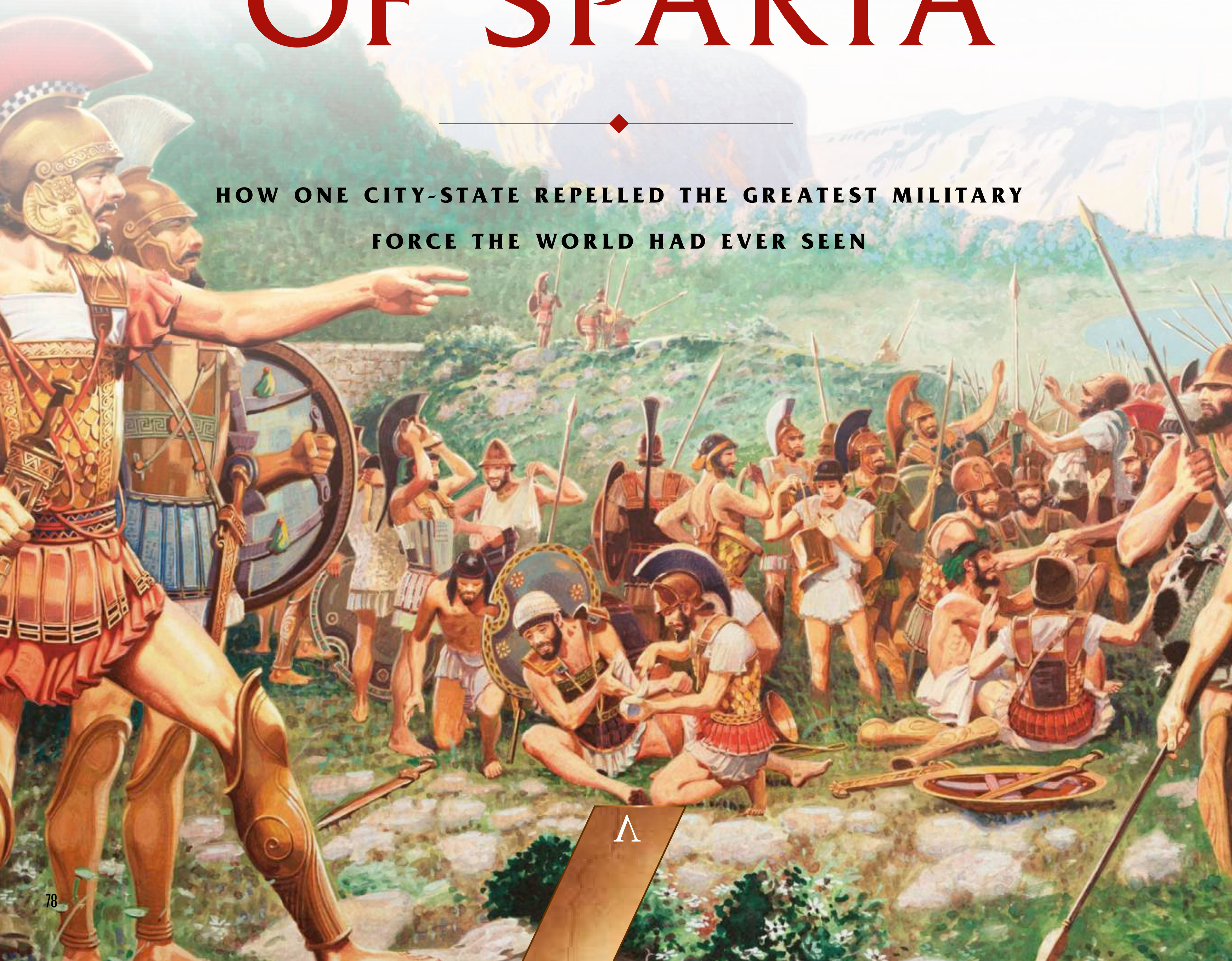
98 GREEK WARSHIPS
Climb aboard a trireme and explore the inner workings of the ships that turned the Persian tide

84

88

THE WRATH OF SPARTA

HOW ONE CITY-STATE REPELLED THE GREATEST MILITARY FORCE THE WORLD HAD EVER SEEN



HOW HARD would you fight if your home country was being invaded? Fiercely no doubt, but what would you do if it under attack by the largest military force that the world had ever seen? Well, if you were a Spartan, the most war-loving, brutal and savage city-state in the entirety of Greece, then you would fight - and you would do so to the last man. That is exactly what King Leonidas I of Sparta did in 480 BCE and, despite falling in battle, he fell a free man on his home country's soil and helped repel the Persians from mainland Greece once and for all.

The second Persian invasion of Greece was catalysed by the spectacular failure of the first, with the then Persian king Darius I seeing his desire to subjugate the city-states of Athens and Eretria end brutally at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. Indeed, despite sending over 300,000 soldiers to take down the Persian's western enemy, the majority of Greece - and certainly the mainland - remained firmly out of Persian hands, with Darius himself checked in his empire's expansion for the first time. After receiving the news of the defeat, however, his will remained intact, and he began preparations for an even larger second invasion.

Unfortunately, while his determination never faltered, his body certainly did, and Darius died four years later during the army's assembly in 486 BCE. The control of the world's largest empire fell to his son Xerxes I, who six years later set out to finish what his father had started. Partly blaming the Greeks for his father's perceived premature death, Xerxes drew the finest warriors from across his vast empire, including the largest contingent of Persian Immortals - their legendary elite warriors - that had ever been amassed. With an army over twice that of his father, Xerxes set sail.

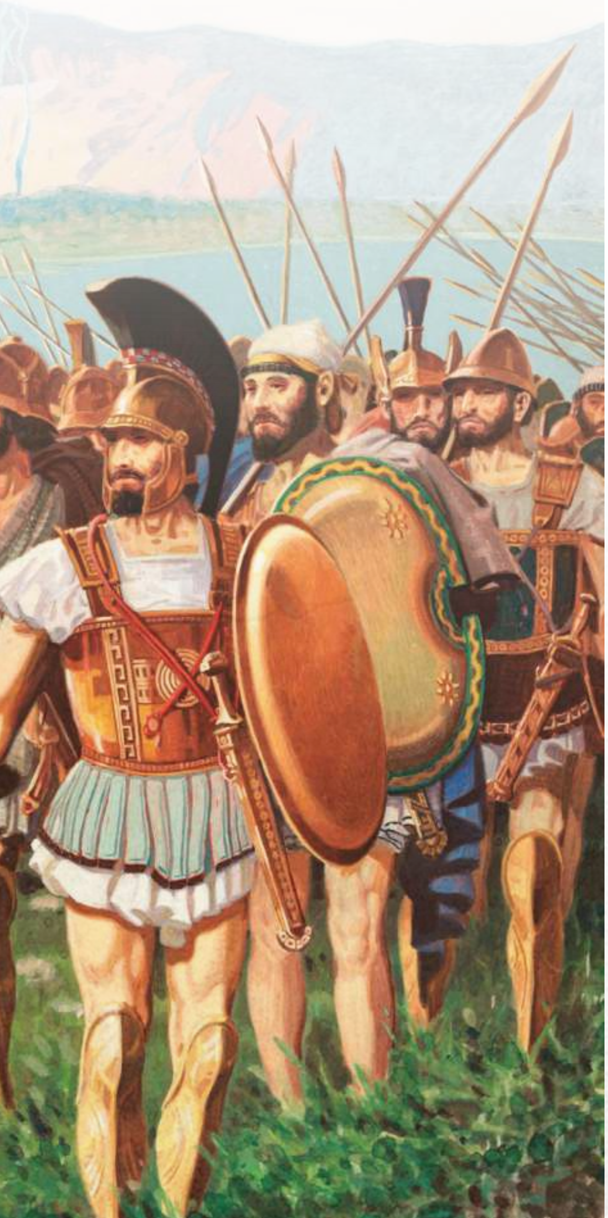
The Battle of Thermopylae in August 480 BCE may not have been the turning point in the second invasion of Greece by the Persian Empire, but it was certainly representative of why King Xerxes I of Persia eventually had to withdraw from his planned conquest of the country and return unceremoniously to Asia defeated. By combining their forces and fighting for their country, the independent city-states of Greece truly demonstrated that numbers are not everything in war, as well as that tactics and ideological desire are both key in deciding the outcome of any conflict.

Talking of numbers, with regards to Xerxes' vast Persian invading army, we are talking serious numbers - a force that according to ancient sources consisted of over 1 million men, and even according to modern sources was hundreds of thousands of people strong. This horde landed at the coastal pass of Thermopylae on the Malian Gulf of Greece intent on plundering the land of its natural resources and people, not to mention adding the ancient civilisation to its seemingly ever-expanding and unstoppable empire. Combating this gigantic army was a combined force of just over 10,000 Greek hoplites, the elite warriors of the nation's city-states.

On paper, this discrepancy in numbers between the two forces makes the outcome seem a forgone conclusion, but for three days of fierce fighting it was not so, with the Greeks, led by Leonidas, holding Xerxes' Persian army. Thermopylae, which translates as the 'Hot Gates', is a narrow coastal pass leading from the Malian Gulf to mainland Greece. It is also - and this was crucial - the only main entrance through which a large army could pass. The Greeks knew this and, after realising that Xerxes was to land there, dispatched Leonidas and their defensive force to intercept and hold him in the pass of the Hot Gates while the Athenian navy combated the accompanying Persian fleet.

That naval engagement came at the Battle of Artemisium, a planned tactical ambush of the Persian fleet at the Straits of Artemisium that - like Leonidas' defence of the Hot Gates - was chosen by the Athenian general Themistocles, because it would effectively multiply the effectiveness of the 270 ships of the Greek navy against their significantly larger counterparts. Indeed, as the Persians outnumbered the Greeks on land, so too did they at sea, with the Persian fleet totalling over 800 ships in all. In fact, when Xerxes set sail for Greece, the fleet originally numbered over 1,200 ships, however, after getting caught in a fierce storm off the coast of Magnesia, that number was reduced by a third, with thousands of Persians drowning at sea.

The remaining Persian fleet therefore approached Artemisium towards the end of summer depleted but still with four times the ships of the combined might of the Greek city-states. Their confidence in victory wasn't to late, for after sailing directly into the straits, they were violently ambushed. And so began what would end up being one of the most epic naval battles in all of history. At first the combination of the Greek navy's tactics, such as preventing Persian flanking manoeuvres with a novel flared-crescent formation, and the element of surprise negated the Persians' superior seamanship, with 30 ships of their



fleet sent on their way to the bottom of the ocean with minimal Greek losses. In fact, these casualties, on top of the poor state of some of the surviving Persian fleet after the Magnesia storm, meant that the start of the second day of the battle contained minimal activity, with the Persians hanging back in order to make much-needed repairs.

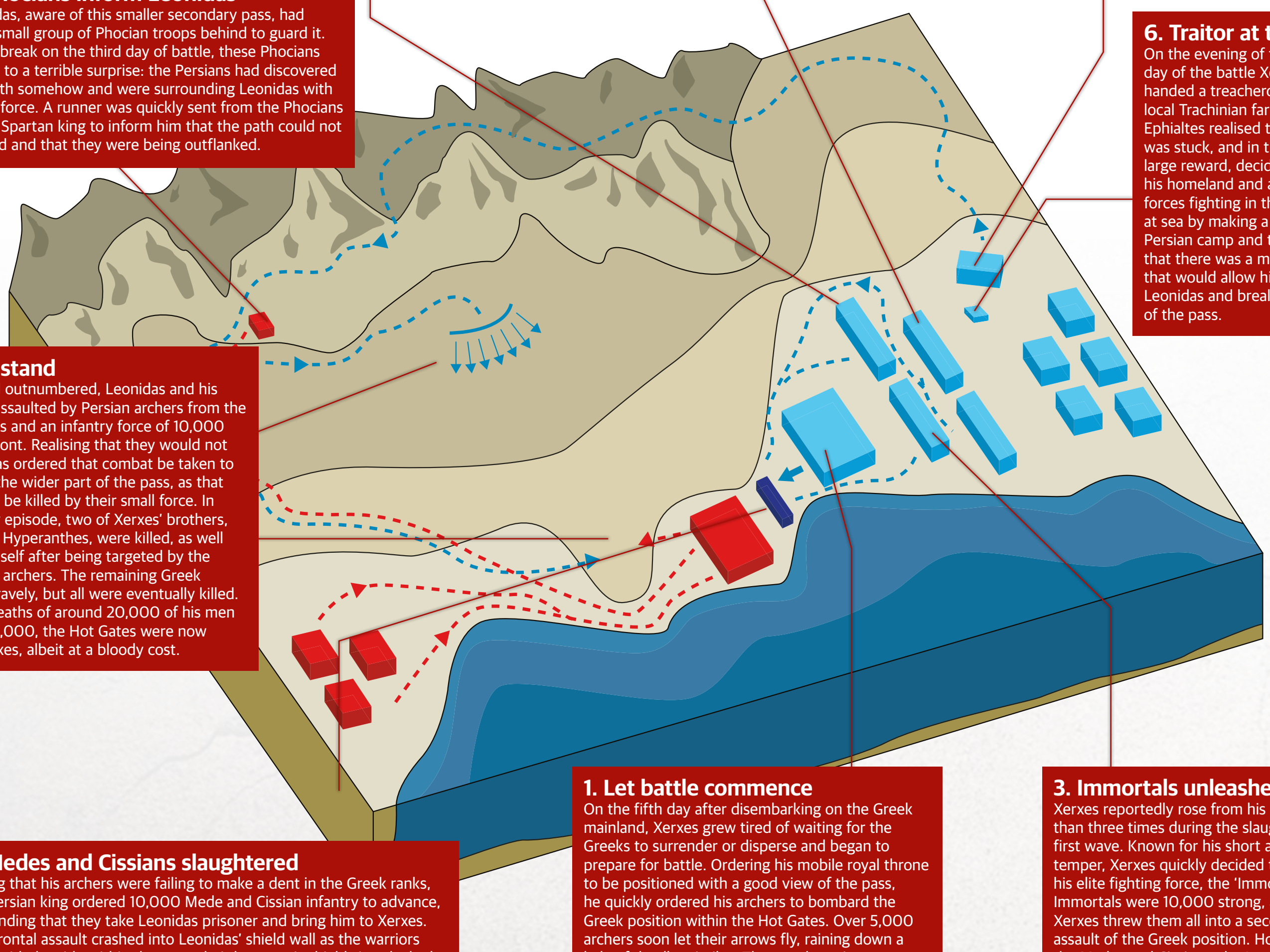
The Greek navy exploited this inactivity on the afternoon of the second day by hunting down a Persian patrol fleet and destroying it totally, with news of the losses quickly spreading throughout the Persian navy. Angered by this setback and now repositioned to best counter the Greeks, the Persians attacked with full force on the morning of the third day of the battle, with hundreds of ships smashing into the Greek naval lines in a countering semi-circle formation.

Now at liberty to display their superior nautical skills, the Persian sailors soon started to get a grip on the battle, with significant losses inflicted in an inferno of Greek and Persian fire.

As the flames licked higher throughout the third day, all attempts at tactical positioning were rendered futile, with a marine melee ensuring that by nightfall over 200 Persian ships and 100 Greek ships had fallen into Poseidon's domain.

So far the Persian fleet had been checked, but this had come at a great cost, with over a third of the Greek navy being destroyed in battle. The Straits had been successfully held though - just like the Hot Gates needed to be held by Leonidas.

Across the sea from the war-weary Greek navy, the main event was about to get underway. Just like at Artemisium, the Greek plan was simple yet - they hoped - beautifully effective. By forcing Xerxes' forces into the narrow pass, their superior numbers could be



1. Let battle commence

On the fifth day after disembarking on the Greek mainland, Xerxes grew tired of waiting for the Greeks to surrender or disperse and began to prepare for battle. Ordering his mobile royal throne to be positioned with a good view of the pass, he quickly ordered his archers to bombard the Greek position within the Hot Gates. Over 5,000 archers soon let their arrows fly, raining down a hale of deadly missiles. They made no impact at all, however, with Leonidas' force's metal helmets, breastplates and shields stopping them dead.

2. Medes and Cissians slaughtered

Seeing that his archers were failing to make a dent in the Greek ranks, the Persian king ordered 10,000 Mede and Cissian infantry to advance, demanding that they take Leonidas prisoner and bring him to Xerxes. This frontal assault crashed into Leonidas' shield wall as the warriors stood side-by-side within the pass, their large aspis shields interlocked. As such, the wall held, and the fiercer, better equipped and better trained Greeks soon slaughtered every last one of the invaders.

3. Immortals unleashed

Xerxes reportedly rose from his throne no less than three times during the slaughter of his first wave. Known for his short and volatile temper, Xerxes quickly decided to unleash his elite fighting force, the 'Immortals'. The Immortals were 10,000 strong, and in a rage Xerxes threw them all into a second frontal assault of the Greek position. However, as with the Medes and Cissians, the Immortals' name was soon fatally challenged, with almost all of them falling in hand-to-hand combat.

4. The terrible wrath of Persia

Despite only handfuls of Greek warriors falling during the first day of combat compared to the thousands of Persian losses, Xerxes believed that on the second day a further frontal assault would be too much for the small Greek force, overwhelming them due to exhaustion and inflicted wounds. He was wrong. After launching a further frontal assault on the Greek position and watching thousands more of his men fall, he flew into a rage and sanctioned his vast heavy cavalry to attack.

5. Cavalry charge

The heavy cavalry attacked and combat proceeded for the entirety of the second day, with thousands of Persians and hundreds of Greeks falling in battle. Leonidas kept his casualties low by rotating the men at the front of the shield wall, ensuring that those engaging with the Persians were constantly battle-fresh. A series of feigned retreats also ate into the Persian cavalry and infantry greatly, leaving the Hot Gates still in Greek control at the end of the second day and Xerxes firmly stuck on the coast of mainland Greece.

6. Traitor at the Gates

On the evening of the second day of the battle Xerxes was handed a treacherous gift. A local Trachinian farmer named Ephialtes realised that Xerxes was stuck, and in the hope of a large reward, decided to betray his homeland and all of the Greek forces fighting in the pass and at sea by making a visit to the Persian camp and telling Xerxes that there was a mountain path that would allow him to outflank Leonidas and break his blockade of the pass.

7. Hydarnes despatched

Xerxes quickly despatched Ephialtes and Hydarnes, his foremost surviving commander to travel up the path with 20,000 of his men. The path led from the east of the Persian camp along the ridge of Mount Anopaea and behind the cliffs that flanked the pass where Leonidas was positioned.

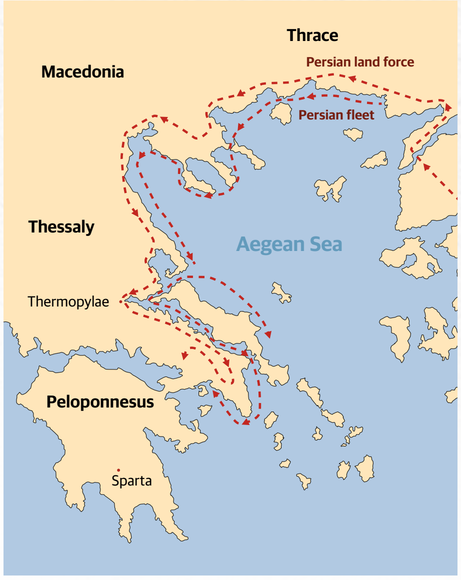
8. Phocians inform Leonidas

Leonidas, aware of this smaller secondary pass, had left a small group of Phocian troops behind to guard it. At daybreak on the third day of battle, these Phocians awoke to a terrible surprise: the Persians had discovered the path somehow and were surrounding Leonidas with a vast force. A runner was quickly sent from the Phocians to the Spartan king to inform him that the path could not be held and that they were being outflanked.

9. The last stand

Surrounded and outnumbered, Leonidas and his Spartans were assaulted by Persian archers from the Hot Gates' flanks and an infantry force of 10,000 men from the front. Realising that they would not survive, Leonidas ordered that combat be taken to the Persians in the wider part of the pass, as that way more could be killed by their small force. In this final bloody episode, two of Xerxes' brothers, Abrocomes and Hyperanthes, were killed, as well as Leonidas himself after being targeted by the flanking Persian archers. The remaining Greek forces fought bravely, but all were eventually killed. Following the deaths of around 20,000 of his men to the Greek's 2,000, the Hot Gates were now passable to Xerxes, albeit at a bloody cost.

“BY COMBINING THEIR FORCES, THE CITY-STATES OF GREECE DEMONSTRATED THAT NUMBERS ARE NOT EVERYTHING IN WAR”



rendered obsolete, with only a set number of them capable of engaging Leonidas' men at one time. Indeed, this tactic acted as a force multiplier for the Greeks and led to one of the most famous military defences of all time, with Leonidas claiming tens of thousands of Persian lives with just the loss of 2,000 Greeks.

The amount of damage Leonidas managed to inflict with his elite Spartan warriors - the toughest, best-trained and most combat-savage of all Greek warriors - was immense and cannot be understated. Leading the defence of the Greek shield wall, these Spartans earned their passage to the afterlife with a combat prowess loaded with a lifetime's gathering of hatred, blood and skull-crushing steel, impaling, cleaving, rending and splitting Persian bone and body in a series of actions akin to those of the demon-minions of Hades, the Greek lord of hell. The Persians who were sent against this wall of hatred were not just checked but totally obliterated, their corpses stacked in a grotesque barrier against Xerxes' hopes of progress.

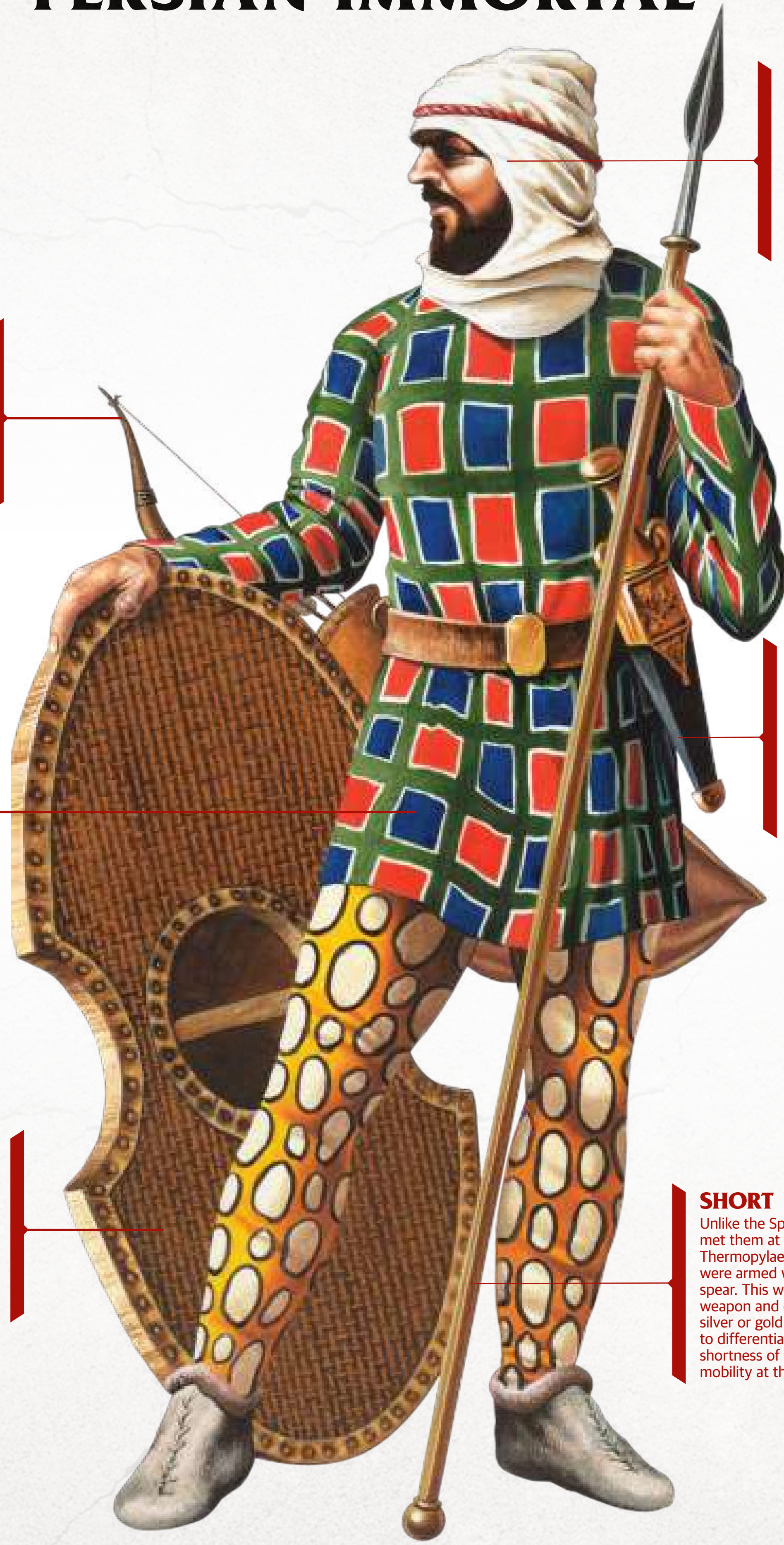
Despite the wrath of Sparta being unleashed, for Leonidas and a brave rear-guard force of around 1,000 Greeks, the Battle of Thermopylae ended in death, with the warrior-king famously betrayed by one of his own. However, he and his men's actions and sacrifice acted as a catalyst for the remaining Greek forces. It united the typically unruly, warring and independent city-states in the defence of their country, showing that the Persians were not unbeatable and that their infamous Immortals, supposedly unkillable elite warriors, could indeed bleed and pass screaming into the Persian underworld of Duzakh.

Greek scouts, retreating along with the bulk of Leonidas' force, immediately relayed the failure to hold the Gates not just to the surviving Greek navy but also to every city-state in Greece, leading to the evacuation of many, including the capital city of Athens. Themistocles, learning of the failure to hold the Gates, quickly ordered the waters of Artemisium to be evacuated realising that without the Gates their defence of the Straits was futile. As such, on the fourth day of the Battle of Artemisium the Greek navy retreated north to the Straits of Salamis in an attempt to regroup and replan. Despite the heroic efforts of Leonidas, his Spartans and the thousands of Greek soldiers who had fought to repel the Persians, all of their sacrifices now seem destined to be in vain. However, as history shows, the Greeks were down but not out.

Following the events of Thermopylae, Xerxes' troops made some headway into Greece - even taking and ransacking Athens itself - but a month later his fleet was trapped at Salamis by the Greeks, where it was left severely depleted after a combined naval assault. This left Xerxes lacking the ships, men and - crucially - the will to continue the conquest, and they were forced to retreat back to Asia. By the time the Persian king's forces had returned to their homeland, almost all of his once colossal army had died of sickness or starvation, and so the invasion of the largest military force the world had ever seen had been repelled.

A few more battles between the Greeks and Persians followed, but the East's expansion into the West had been fatally hindered at Thermopylae, and Sparta, the courageous city-state that led the resistance, remained a beacon of what can be achieved if ideals are chased and never abandoned.

ANATOMY OF A PERSIAN IMMORTAL



HEADDRESS

Unlike the sturdy metal helmets worn by the Greeks at Thermopylae, the Persian Immortals wore a tiara-style headdress. This was made from cloth and felt and could be pulled down from the crown around the face to prevent dust from clouding their vision while in battle or on arid terrain.

SHORT BOW

A weapon for which the average Spartan warrior had no use, the Immortals carried a short bow and an arrow quiver on their backs. This granted them a flexibility to alter their combat range quickly, switching from hand-to-hand to ranged combat in the blink of an eye.

DAGGER

When spear or bow was of no use, the Immortals favoured a large dagger over a short sword. These were worn off the robe at waist level and were heavily curved. Their hilts were often ornate, with more important soldiers having precious metals or jewels inlaid into them.

SCALE ARMOUR

The Immortals came dressed in scale armour, which sat beneath an outer robe. The armour was a series of iron plates interlocked together and with a backing of cloth and leather. It provided a modest level of protection and was primarily worn with mobility in mind.

WICKER SHIELD

The Immortals carried an oval-shaped shield made from wicker. Overall, these shields offered less protection than their Greek counterparts, although they were still formidable defensive barriers, with only the strongest of spear thrusts capable of rending them in two. More important officers often carried shields with silver or gold rims.

SHORT SPEAR

Unlike the Spartan warriors that met them at the Hot Gates of Thermopylae, the Immortals were armed with a much shorter spear. This was their primary weapon and each was tipped with silver or gold counterbalances to differentiate their rank. The shortness of the spear gave mobility at the cost of reach.

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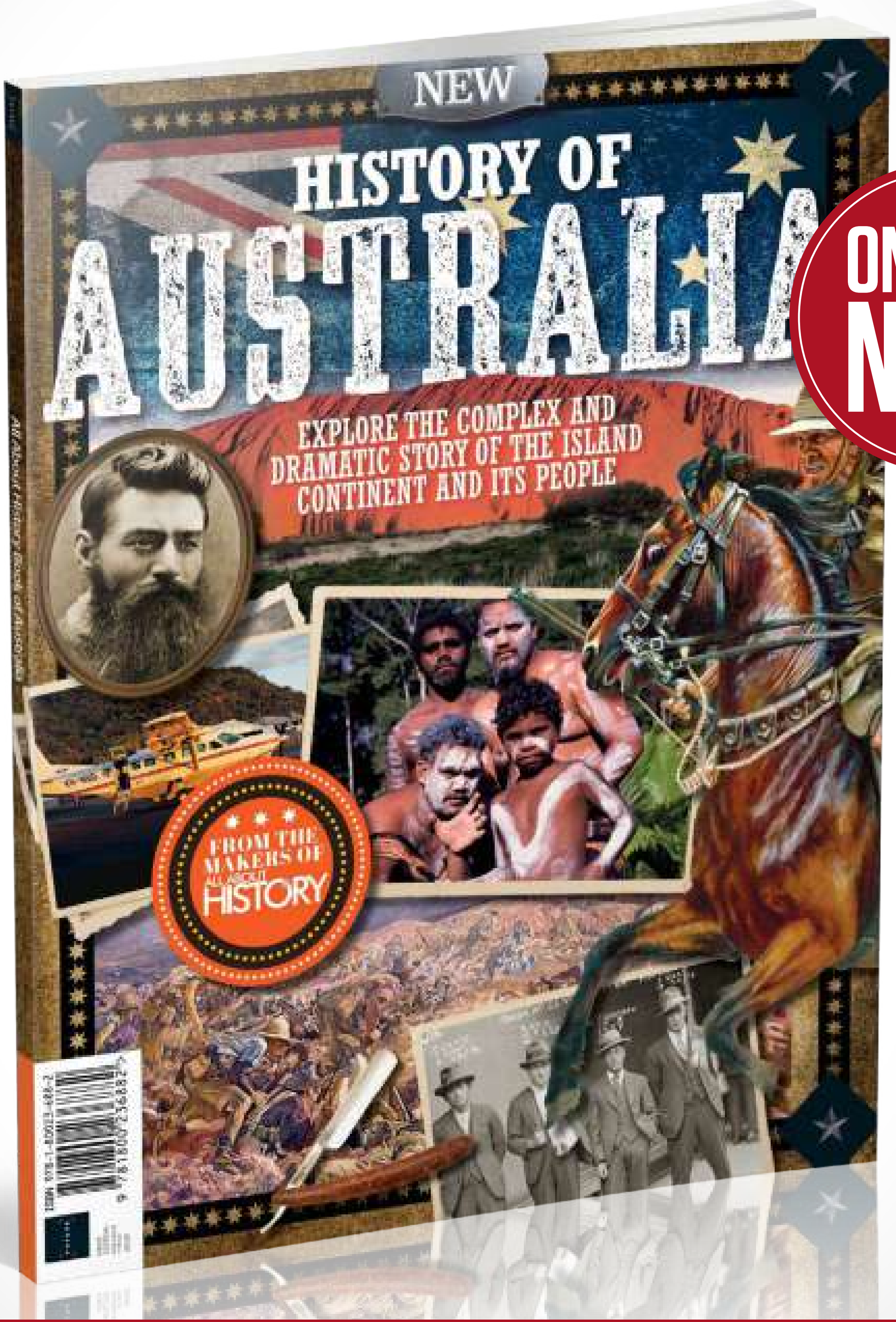
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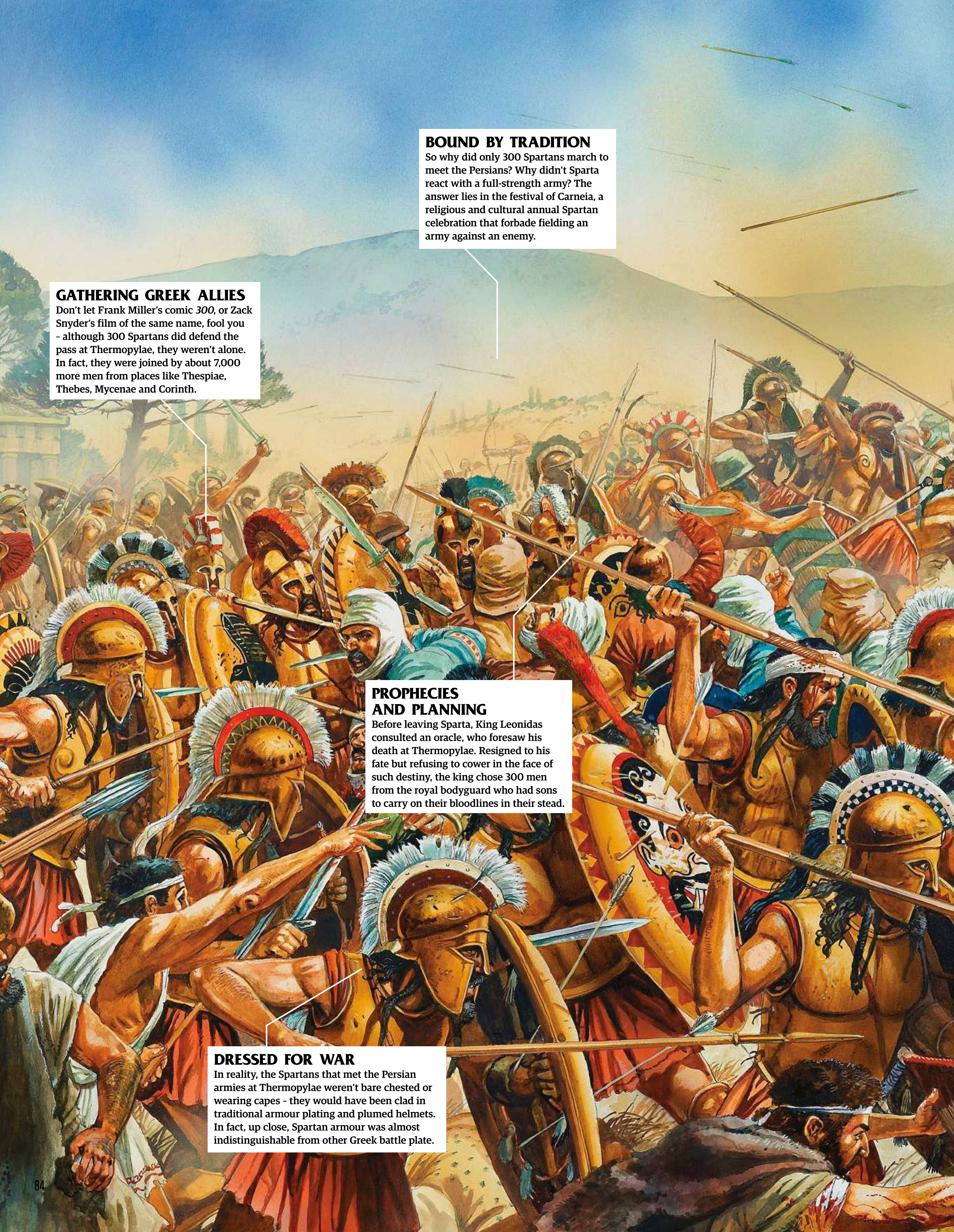


BOUND BY TRADITION

So why did only 300 Spartans march to meet the Persians? Why didn't Sparta react with a full-strength army? The answer lies in the festival of Carneia, a religious and cultural annual Spartan celebration that forbade fielding an army against an enemy.

GATHERING GREEK ALLIES

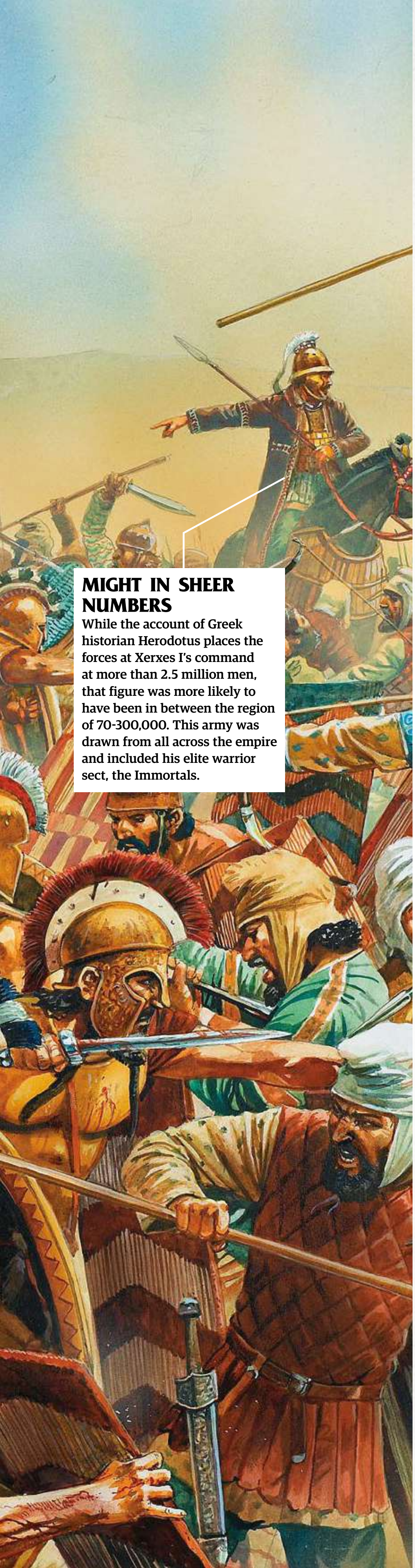
Don't let Frank Miller's comic *300*, or Zack Snyder's film of the same name, fool you – although 300 Spartans did defend the pass at Thermopylae, they weren't alone. In fact, they were joined by about 7,000 more men from places like Thespiae, Thebes, Mycenae and Corinth.

PROPHECIES AND PLANNING

Before leaving Sparta, King Leonidas consulted an oracle, who foresaw his death at Thermopylae. Resigned to his fate but refusing to cower in the face of such destiny, the king chose 300 men from the royal bodyguard who had sons to carry on their bloodlines in their stead.

DRESSED FOR WAR

In reality, the Spartans that met the Persian armies at Thermopylae weren't bare chested or wearing capes – they would have been clad in traditional armour plating and plumed helmets. In fact, up close, Spartan armour was almost indistinguishable from other Greek battle plate.



MIGHT IN SHEER NUMBERS

While the account of Greek historian Herodotus places the forces at Xerxes I's command at more than 2.5 million men, that figure was more likely to have been in between the region of 70-300,000. This army was drawn from all across the empire and included his elite warrior sect, the Immortals.

THE BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE

◆

THERMOPYLAE, GREECE 480 BCE

IMMORTALISED ON stage, screen and the pages of literature and sequential art, the battle between 300 war-hardened Spartans and the armies of the entire Persian Empire has rightfully become the stuff of legend. The fact that such a confrontation can be called a 'battle' considering the sheer one-sided nature of it gives you some idea just how brutally efficient the warriors of Greece were. The Battle of Thermopylae was one of many skirmishes of the Greco-Persian Wars, a series of conflicts that raged between the Achaemenid Empire of Persia and the free city-states of Greece between 499 BCE and 449 BCE.

The Persian Empire had risen around the mid-6th century BCE and expanded exponentially across Asia, Europe and the Mediterranean; eventually its eyes fell on the fragmented states of Greece. Established by Cyrus the Great in 550 BCE, the Achaemenid Empire (also known as the First Persian Empire) became the largest imperial domain of the ancient world thanks to its impressive armies, which swelled with every new territory.

For the Persians, Greece remained a distant principality of little consideration, but a political misunderstanding between the two would set the stage for war and invasion. The Persian monarch, King Darius, demanded gifts of water and earth from every known land as symbols of their obedience and would send emissaries across the Persian Empire and beyond to collect them. One such emissary was met by the Greeks, and believing the man had come to organise an alliance with Persia, he was duly sent back to his masters with a suitable offering in tow.

When news of the Greek pledge reached the Athenian Assembly – the governmental construct that oversaw the running of Athenian society – it immediately distanced itself from the offering, keen to preserve its status of independence. Upon hearing of the foreign principality's refusal to recognise his sovereignty, the Persian monarch dispatched a fleet to bring the rebels to heel.

The campaign proved a disaster for Darius. His armies were stunningly defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE, and when the king died four years later it fell to his son Xerxes to continue the campaign. Xerxes I spent four years amassing a grand army powerful enough to subdue all Greece and the defiant Athenians.

The Athenians knew the might of the Persian war hammer would strike, so in 482 BCE a plan was put in place to build a huge fleet of ships to tackle the Persian sea offensive. However, Athens realised it could not fight on both sea and land and so sought an alliance of sorts with one of the other Greek states that had rejected Persian advances – Sparta.

The Spartans were a hardy breed, born fighters who trained from childhood to kill with brutal efficiency. Yet despite the cultural and political differences between the two peoples, they agreed a coalition.

The alliance soon learned that Xerxes' army, believed to have been between 70,000 and 300,000 strong, would pass through the narrow southern pass of Thermopylae. A plan was devised to funnel the Persians into the pass, bleed them dry and then drive them out of Greece once and for all.

GREEK CITY-STATES

TROOPS 7,000
CAVALRY 0

KING LEONIDAS I

LEADER

Plutarch tells us that the fearsome Spartan leader uttered the iconic phrase, "Tonight, we dine in Hell!" at the battle.

Strengths Superior infantry tactics and training; use of the Phalanx.

Weakness Sparta was forbidden from going to battle during Carneia so could only send 300 men.

THESPIAN ARMY

UNIT

King Demophilus of Thespiae brought 700 of his men to support the Spartans at Thermopylae.

Strengths Strong allies with the state of Sparta, Thespian men worked well with the Spartans.

Weakness Demophilus, like Leonidas, fought with his men at Thermopylae, so was vulnerable from the start.

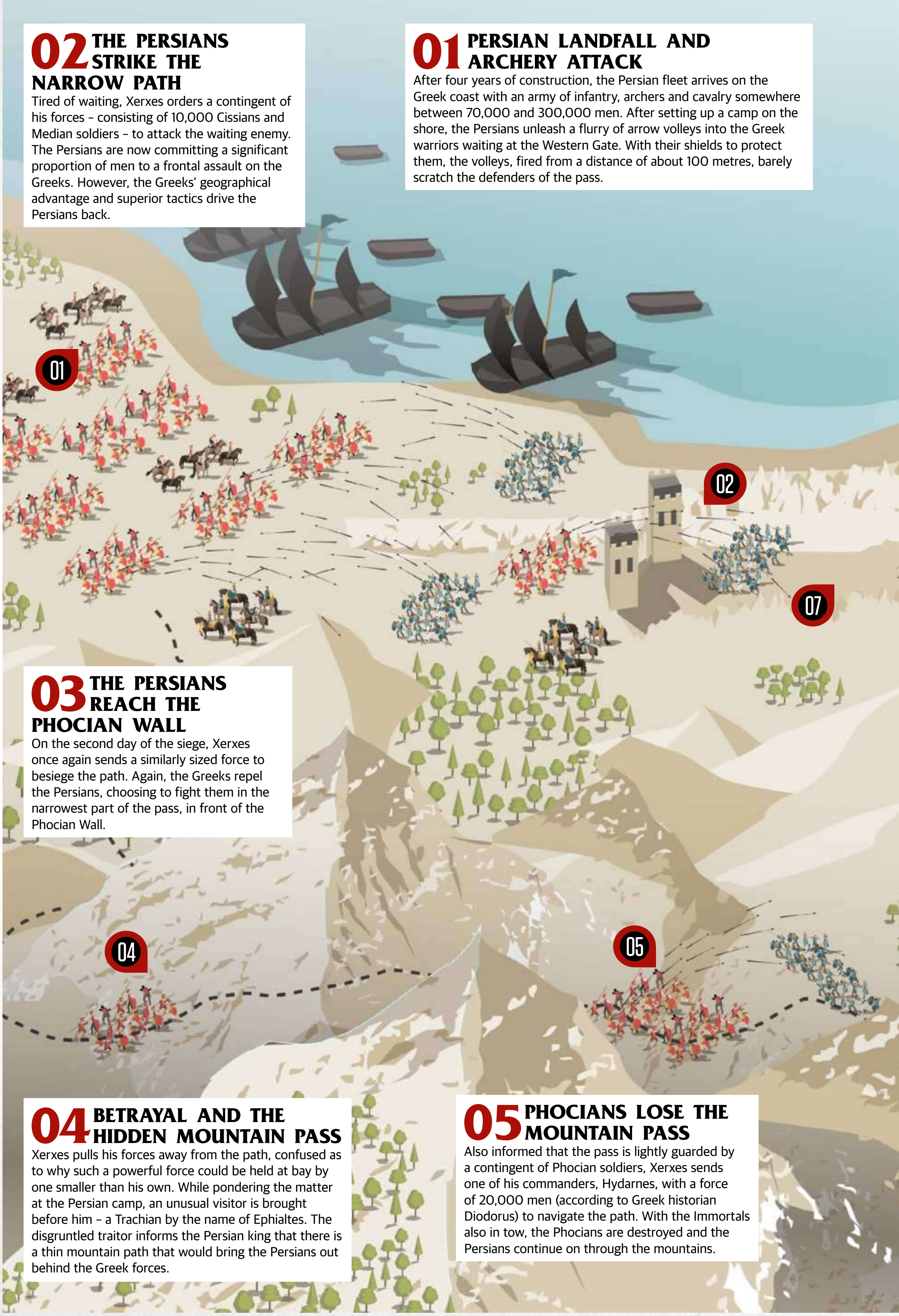
THE PHALANX

KEY WEAPON

This battle tactic (later mirrored by the Romans) saw the Greeks create an impenetrable 'box' of overlapped shields and spears.

Strengths Being protected against archer volleys enabled Spartans to push infantry and cavalry back.

Weakness Could be slow-moving, allowing cavalry to circle and attack.



01 PERSIAN LANDFALL AND ARCHERY ATTACK

After four years of construction, the Persian fleet arrives on the Greek coast with an army of infantry, archers and cavalry somewhere between 70,000 and 300,000 men. After setting up a camp on the shore, the Persians unleash a flurry of arrow volleys into the Greek warriors waiting at the Western Gate. With their shields to protect them, the volleys, fired from a distance of about 100 metres, barely scratch the defenders of the pass.

02 THE PERSIANS STRIKE THE NARROW PATH

Tired of waiting, Xerxes orders a contingent of his forces – consisting of 10,000 Cissians and Median soldiers – to attack the waiting enemy. The Persians are now committing a significant proportion of men to a frontal assault on the Greeks. However, the Greeks' geographical advantage and superior tactics drive the Persians back.

03 THE PERSIANS REACH THE PHOCIAN WALL

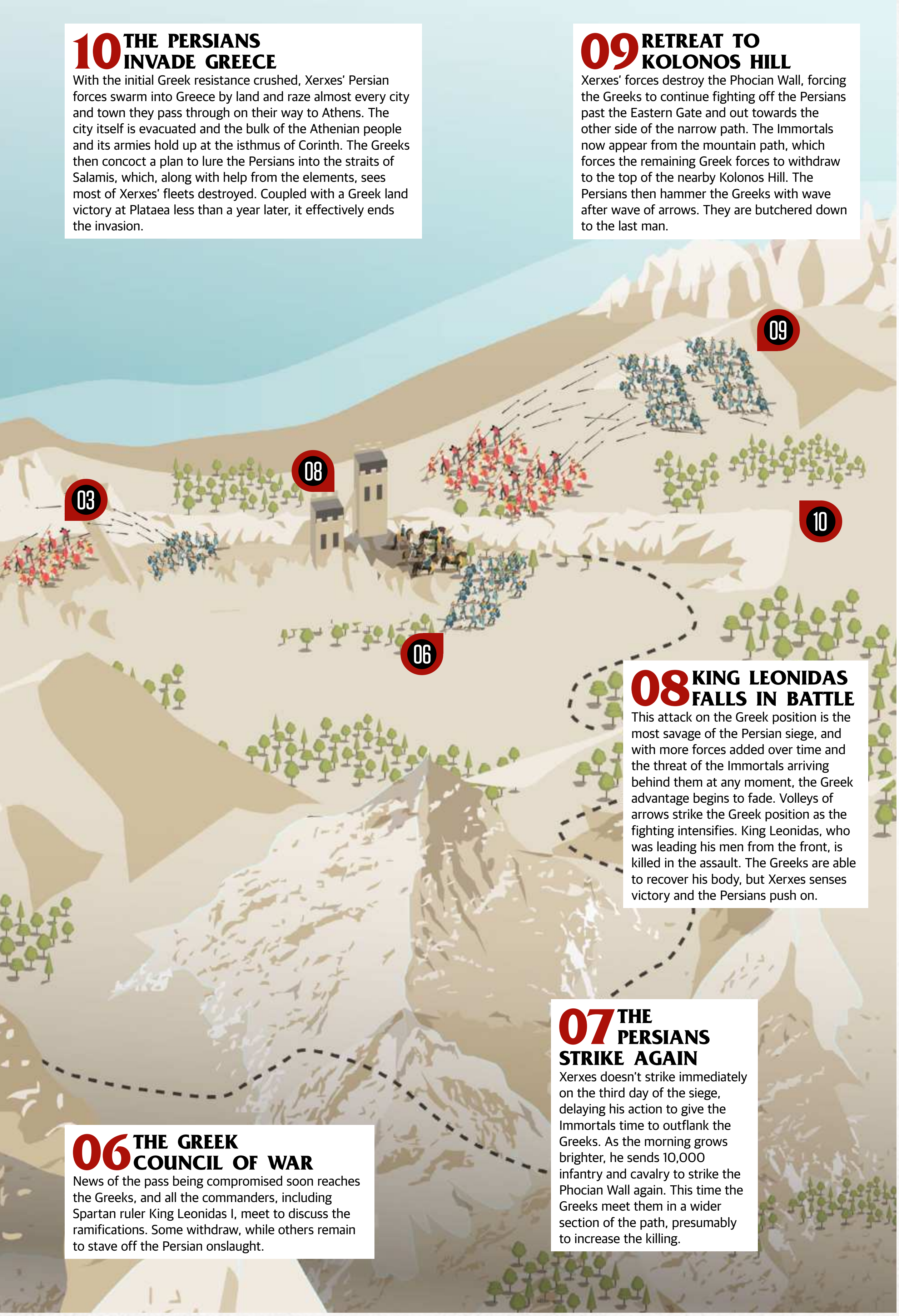
On the second day of the siege, Xerxes once again sends a similarly sized force to besiege the path. Again, the Greeks repel the Persians, choosing to fight them in the narrowest part of the pass, in front of the Phocian Wall.

04 BETRAYAL AND THE HIDDEN MOUNTAIN PASS

Xerxes pulls his forces away from the path, confused as to why such a powerful force could be held at bay by one smaller than his own. While pondering the matter at the Persian camp, an unusual visitor is brought before him – a Trachian by the name of Ephialtes. The disgruntled traitor informs the Persian king that there is a thin mountain path that would bring the Persians out behind the Greek forces.

05 PHOCIANS LOSE THE MOUNTAIN PASS

Also informed that the pass is lightly guarded by a contingent of Phocian soldiers, Xerxes sends one of his commanders, Hydarnes, with a force of 20,000 men (according to Greek historian Diodorus) to navigate the path. With the Immortals also in tow, the Phocians are destroyed and the Persians continue on through the mountains.



06 THE GREEK COUNCIL OF WAR

News of the pass being compromised soon reaches the Greeks, and all the commanders, including Spartan ruler King Leonidas I, meet to discuss the ramifications. Some withdraw, while others remain to stave off the Persian onslaught.

07 THE PERSIANS STRIKE AGAIN

Xerxes doesn't strike immediately on the third day of the siege, delaying his action to give the Immortals time to outflank the Greeks. As the morning grows brighter, he sends 10,000 infantry and cavalry to strike the Phocian Wall again. This time the Greeks meet them in a wider section of the path, presumably to increase the killing.

08 KING LEONIDAS FALLS IN BATTLE

This attack on the Greek position is the most savage of the Persian siege, and with more forces added over time and the threat of the Immortals arriving behind them at any moment, the Greek advantage begins to fade. Volleys of arrows strike the Greek position as the fighting intensifies. King Leonidas, who was leading his men from the front, is killed in the assault. The Greeks are able to recover his body, but Xerxes senses victory and the Persians push on.

09 RETREAT TO KOLONOS HILL

Xerxes' forces destroy the Phocian Wall, forcing the Greeks to continue fighting off the Persians past the Eastern Gate and out towards the other side of the narrow path. The Immortals now appear from the mountain path, which forces the remaining Greek forces to withdraw to the top of the nearby Kolonos Hill. The Persians then hammer the Greeks with wave after wave of arrows. They are butchered down to the last man.

10 THE PERSIANS INVADE GREECE

With the initial Greek resistance crushed, Xerxes' Persian forces swarm into Greece by land and raze almost every city and town they pass through on their way to Athens. The city itself is evacuated and the bulk of the Athenian people and its armies hold up at the isthmus of Corinth. The Greeks then concoct a plan to lure the Persians into the straits of Salamis, which, along with help from the elements, sees most of Xerxes' fleets destroyed. Coupled with a Greek land victory at Plataea less than a year later, it effectively ends the invasion.

ACHAEMENID EMPIRE OF PERSIA

TROOPS 70-300,000
CAVALRY 14-60,000

XERXES I OF PERSIA

LEADER

Xerxes' fevered army building was the result of a prophetic dream urging him to go to war with the defiant Greeks.

Strengths Sheer numbers, his use of cavalry and the variety of troops – including the Immortals.

Weakness Narrow pass at Thermopylae made it difficult for such a large army to progress.

THE IMMORTALS

UNIT

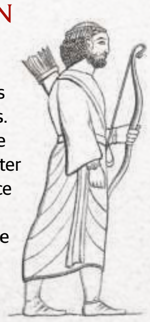
The Immortals were Xerxes' elite bodyguards and were skilled in close-quarters combat and archery.

Strengths According to Herodotus, the Immortals were always 10,000 strong in number.

Weakness Fought wrapped only in cloth (they didn't wear any armour) and used wicker shields.

COMPOSITE BOW

KEY WEAPON



A popular ranged weapon, it was one of a number of bows used by the Persians.

Strengths Could be crafted to yield greater strength and distance for its user.

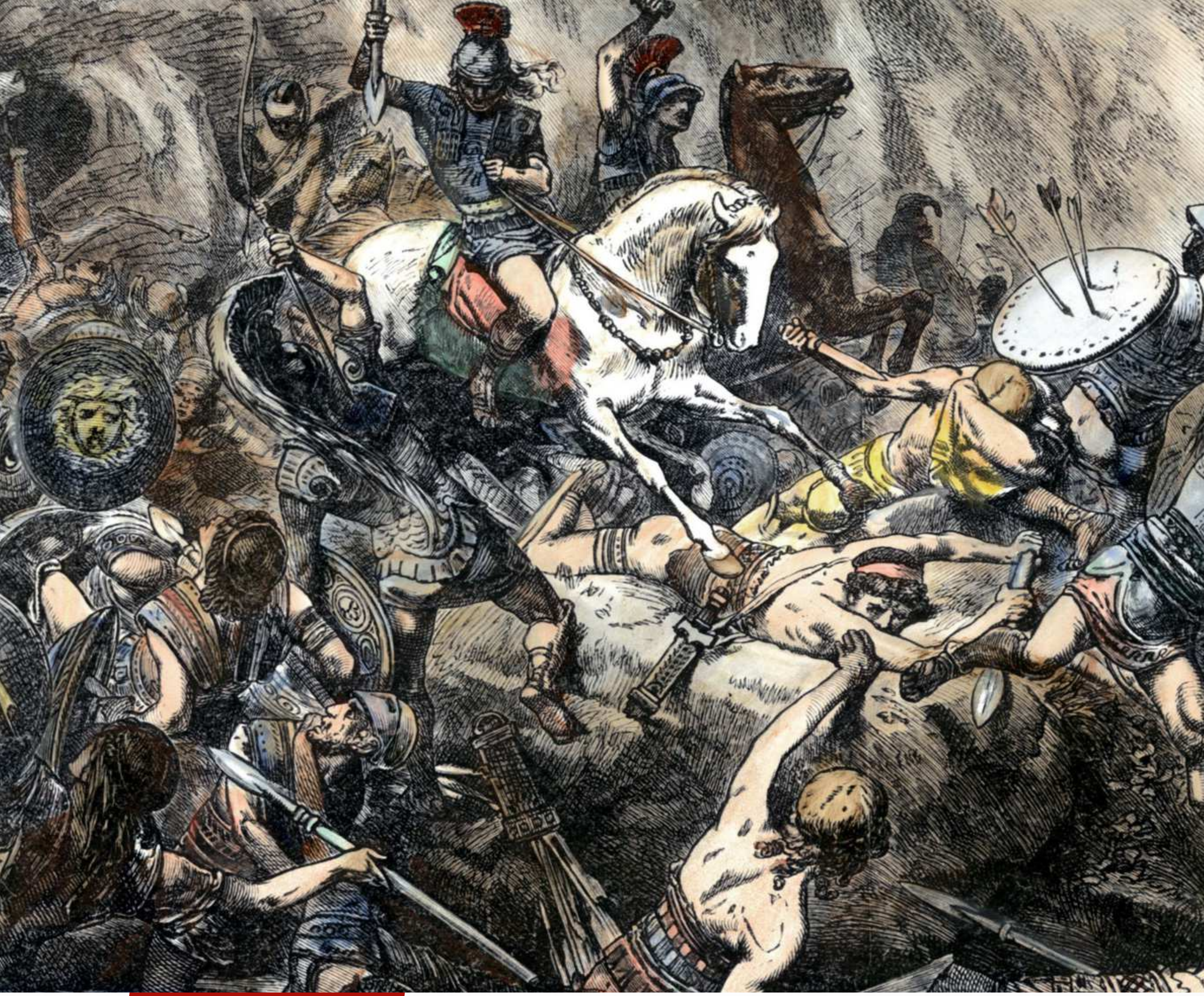
Weakness Sensitive to moisture, it could lose its power in wet conditions.

© Corbis, Edward Crooks

THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

AFTER COMING TOGETHER TO REPEL THE PERSIANS, THE MIGHTY PELOPONNESIAN AND ATHENIAN LEAGUES WERE DRAGGED INTO A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WAR FOR SURVIVAL AND SUPREMACY

WORDS BY ◆ **HARETH AL BUSTANI**



THE GREEK world of the 5th century BCE spanned a network of city-states scattered across the Aegean Sea, the Balkan Peninsula, Sicily and Anatolia. At its heart were Athens and Sparta, the former boasting the strongest navy, the latter the most ferocious warriors. Since the 6th century, Sparta, ruled by two kings, a council of elders and five magistrates called the ephors, had led an alliance of neighbouring polities in the Peloponnese in southern Greece. Athens, on the other hand, was a democracy, ruled over by a council of Five Hundred, who prepared bills that all male citizens could vote on.

When the Persians invaded in 480 BCE, the various Greek city-states formed a defensive alliance and drove them back. After, as Sparta and its allies returned to the Peloponnese, the opportunistic Athenians decided to hold the newly unified 150 city-states together under their leadership, creating the Delian League. While Spartan-allied polities, such as Megara, Corinth and Thebes, were generally ruled by autonomous oligarchs, Athens reduced its allies to tributary states.

Committed to exacting vengeance on the Persians, the Delian League came to resemble an Athenian Empire, with members contributing funds to the central treasury to maintain a fleet of ships and crew. As wheat poured in from Ukraine and fish was transported from the Black Sea, the arrangement made Athens more prosperous than ever, its wealth symbolised by great architectural works across the Athenian heartland of Attica, such as the Long Walls, wrapped all the way around the fortified port of Piraeus, rendering it impregnable. Sparta's opposition to these walls was ignored, leaving them "severely embittered".

In 465, when Sparta's enormous serf-class of helots broke out in rebellion, Athens sent an army to help suppress the revolt only to be asked to leave. The snub led to the rise of a new anti-Spartan regime, which went on to ally with Sparta's regional nemesis, Argos. Tensions erupted into full-blown war in 459 when Sparta's ally Megara defected to the Athenian alliance over a border conflict with fellow

“WHEN MYTILENE FINALLY SURRENDERED, THE ATHENIANS VOTED TO KILL ALL ITS MEN”

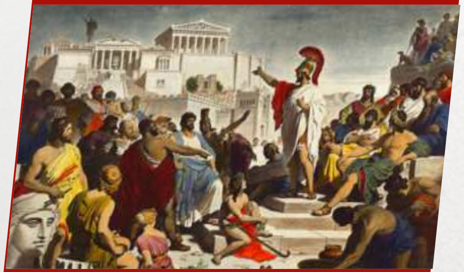
The general Alcibiades, who served Athens, Sparta and Persia, eventually fled to his own fort before being assassinated in a hail of arrows on Lysander's orders

PERICLES

At the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, the most influential of Athens' ten generals was Pericles, the "leading man in Athens" and "the ablest in speech and in action". As a descendent of Cleisthenes, the founder of Athens' democracy, and a champion of democratic policy, he appealed to both the upper classes and masses and was re-elected year after year.

Pericles steered Athens to pursue an unconventional defensive war. He would fight only on sea, where the Athenians were superior, raid the Peloponnese and demonstrate that this was a war the Spartans simply could not win, forcing a quick psychological victory and rapid ceasefire. Eulogising those killed in the first year, the orator boomed, "Knowing that happiness requires freedom, and freedom requires courage, do not shrink from the dangers of war."

However, when the Spartans brought the war to Attica itself, scorching the earth around the city, Pericles' detractors accused him of cowardice. The plague that broke out in 430 was seen as divine retribution, and though Pericles convinced the Athenians to stay the course, he was deposed and condemned on a dubious charge of embezzlement. Though he would return to office for a few months in 429, he too succumbed to the plague, ushering in a more aggressive phase of the war.



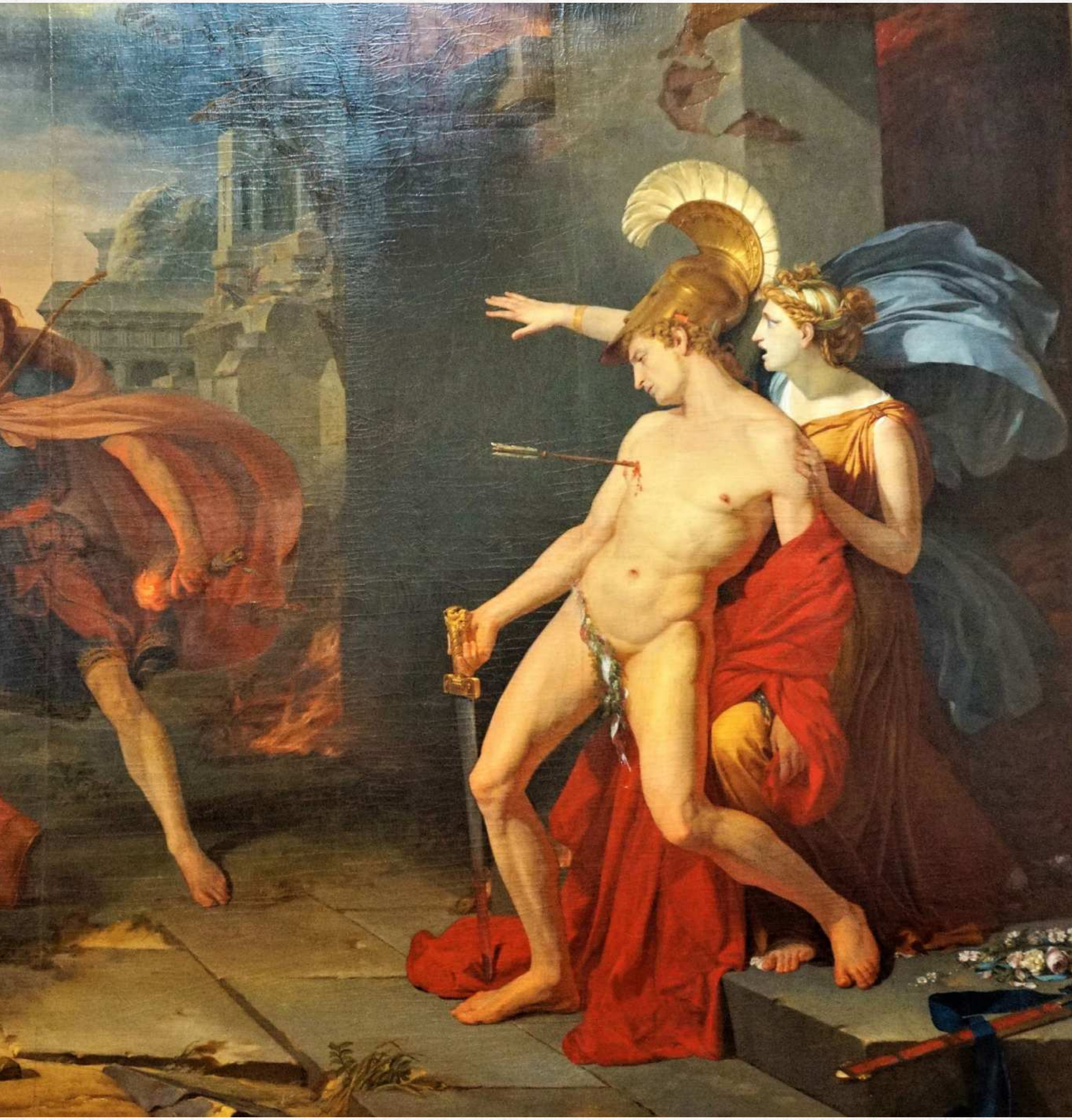
Peloponnesian League member Corinth. After 15 years of intermittent war, waged from Egypt to Sicily, Megara returned to the Peloponnesian side, allowing the Spartan king to lead an army into Attica. The two leagues signed a Thirty Years' Peace treaty in 446, formally dividing the Greek world between them.

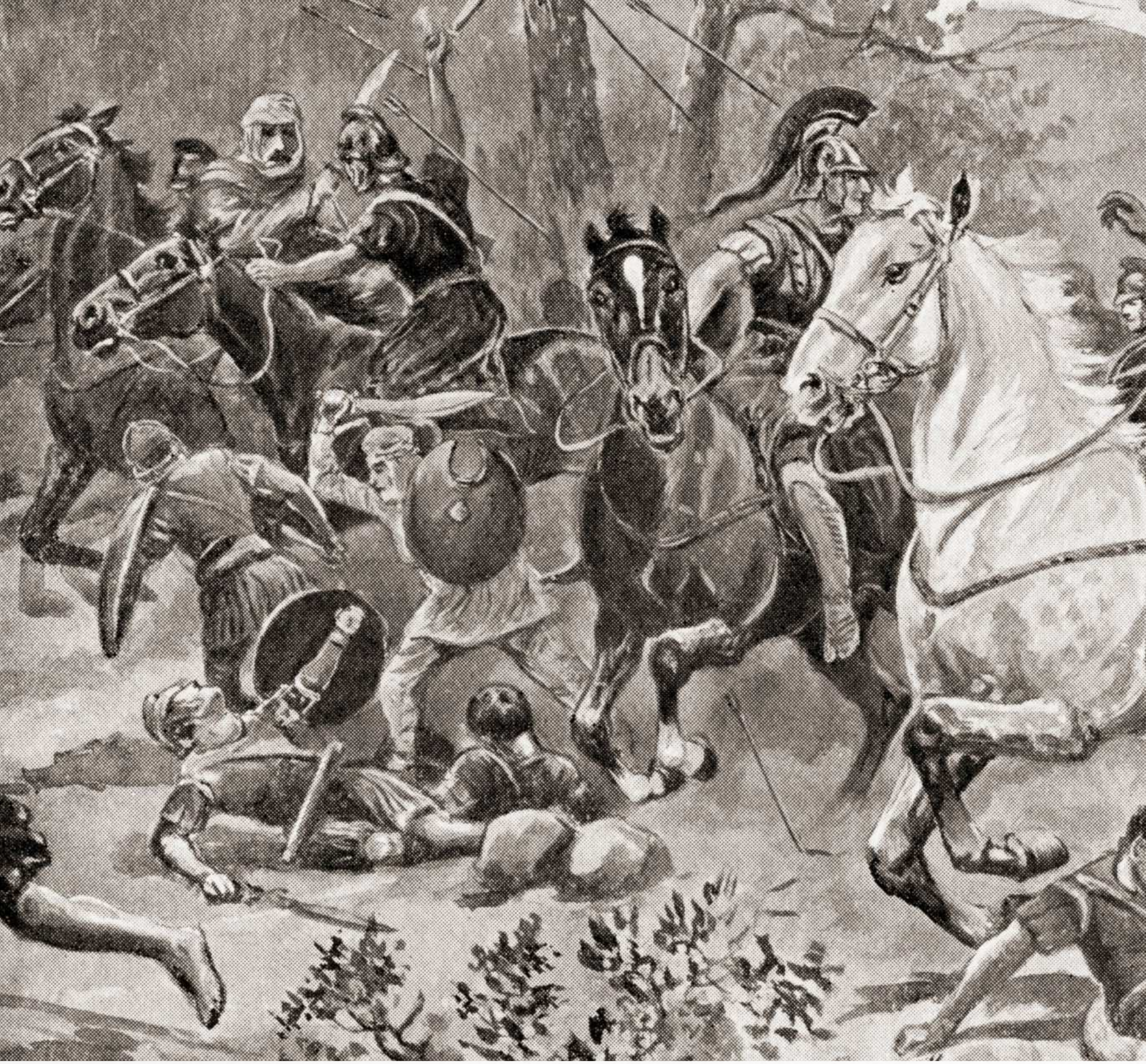
However, the fragile peace would be rocked in 433 when Corinth went to war again, this time with the naval superpower Corcyra. Athens not only sent reinforcements to assist Corcyra but barred Megarians from its harbours, prompting Corinth to urge Sparta to assist its allies, “lest you betray your friends and kinsmen to their worst enemies and turn the rest of us to some other alliance”. Although the Spartan king Archidamus feared a conflict with Athens would be passed “on to our children”, his allies voted for war, adopting the motto “Freedom for all Greeks”.

In March 431, Sparta's ally Thebes snuck 300 men into the minor town of Plataea in Boeotia. However, the townsfolk chased them out, digging tunnels and throwing rocks from the rooftops before slaughtering 180 Theban captives - an event that would set the tone for the conflict to come. As the Athenians rushed in reinforcements, Archidamus invaded Attica, laying waste to its crops and forcing the Athenians to move all their women and children into the city and their livestock to the island of Euboea. Just as the Athenians prepared to mount a response, a catastrophic plague broke out in their overcrowded capital.

Despite their struggles, with the red-cloaked Spartans besieging Plataea, the Athenian general Phormio scored a remarkable victory in the Gulf of Corinth. Facing a fleet of 47 Spartan ships arranged in a tight, outwards-facing defensive circle, Phormio arranged his 20 triremes in a straight line and simply circumnavigated the enemy, closing tighter and tighter until the Spartans could not even manoeuvre their oars, before finally attacking.

When Athens learned that its ally Mytilene was planning to split off and unite the island of Lesbos under its rule, it laid siege to the city. Desperate to fill its war chest, it increased tribute levels across the empire, introducing a new direct tax of 200 talents and killing any general who resisted. When Mytilene finally surrendered, the Athenians voted to kill all



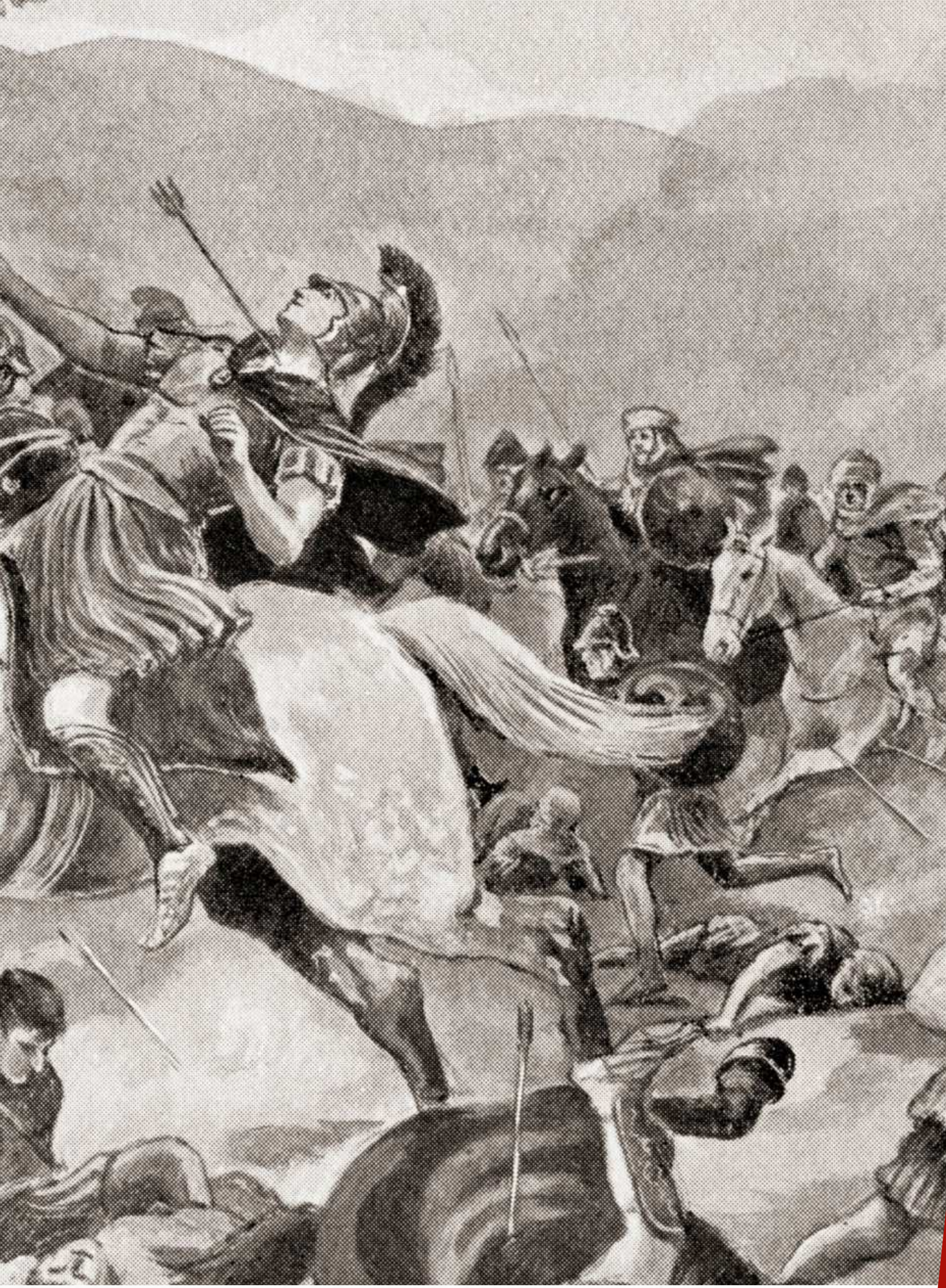


its men and sell its women and children into slavery. Similarly, as the Spartans took Plataea, they promised 'fair trials' to the citizens only to execute 225 men and sell their women into slavery before the Thebans razed the town to the ground. The bloodletting continued on the island of Corcyra, where civil war erupted between the oligarchs and democrats. The general Thucydides reported that, "Father killed son, men were dragged from the temples and killed near them."

Meanwhile, in central Greece, the Spartans invaded their mortal enemy, Argos, with 6,000 men. Outnumbered, on the way to the capital of Argos the Athenian general Demosthenes hid part of his army in bushes for five days and stationed his phalanx along the battlefield. As the Spartans overcame Demosthenes' right wing, the ambush was triggered, outflanking, decimating and routing the Peloponnesians utterly and leaving their general dead in the field. Though the defeated Spartans requested the customary safe passage, after planting his trophy of victory on the battlefield, Demosthenes allowed only the most senior men to leave – a masterstroke of propaganda that painted the Peloponnesians as "betrayers and self-seekers".

In 425, the Spartans suffered another staggering defeat at the southwestern fort of Pylos, which left 420 warriors cut off on the island of Sphacteria. Contrary to the Spartan code, the trapped survivors surrendered – choosing dishonour over death. Athens pressed on with the war, pushing into Megara and Boeotia, where they desecrated the sacred ground of Apollo and captured Cythera and Thyrea, murdering all prisoners from the loathed island of Aegina.

As the Athenian general Hippocrates set off back to the capital from his Boeotian fort of Delium with 17,000 men – Socrates among



them – the Boeotians struck back with an army of 18,500 led by the Theban general Pagondas, who asked that in the face of the Athenians, “who seek to enslave people near and far, how can we do anything but fight to the bitter end?”

At the ensuing battle, Pagondas utilised the first ever deep wing in a hoplite phalanx to deadly effect. At a crucial moment, he sent two cavalry units around a hill, which emerged from the other side and set about mauling 1,000 men – the heaviest Athenian losses to date. After, the Boeotians burned the Athenian garrison off the walls of Delium with a flame-throwing device.

In 421, the Athenian general Nicias negotiated a truce between the two war-weary sides, which was meant to last 50 years. In reality it was broken just eight years later, ushering in a bloodier and longer phase of total war. After conquering the independent island of Melos (once again butchering local men and enslaving the women and children) in 415, the frustrated Athenians looked west to Sicily, where the Syracusans had established hegemony over the island.

Invited by the city of Segesta, the Athenians sent a staggering fleet of 134 triremes, complete with 5,100 hoplites. However, denied anchorage

PEACE OF NICIAS

Although the Spartans won at Amphipolis, the victory was tarnished by the death of the brave general Brasidas. By 421, after a decade of war, the Spartans had tired of bloodshed – their navy had been wiped out, and hundreds of soldiers were being held hostage in Attica. Coupled with the ever-looming threat of a helot rebellion and a resurgent Argos, there seemed little to be gained from continuing the war.

Meanwhile, the Athenians had suffered serious losses at Delium and, still ravaged by plague, faced the prospect of insurrection across the empire. The general Nicias, well-respected in Athens, found little opposition to his peace proposal, and having treated his Spartan prisoners well, he was uniquely placed to negotiate.

The two sides signed a 50-year peace treaty, agreeing to return all conquered territories, with the exception of Thebes keeping Platea and Athens keeping Nisaea, Sollium and Anactorium. However, when ordered to return Amphipolis to Athens, Thrace simply refused. Likewise, the bitter Megara, Elis and Boeotia rejected the terms, with the latter refusing to hand back its Athenian prisoners. Undeterred, the Spartans instead entered a defensive alliance with the Athenians, securing the release of their hostages. Troubled from the start, the peace would formally end after just eight years, when Athens attacked Laconia on behalf of its ally Argos.

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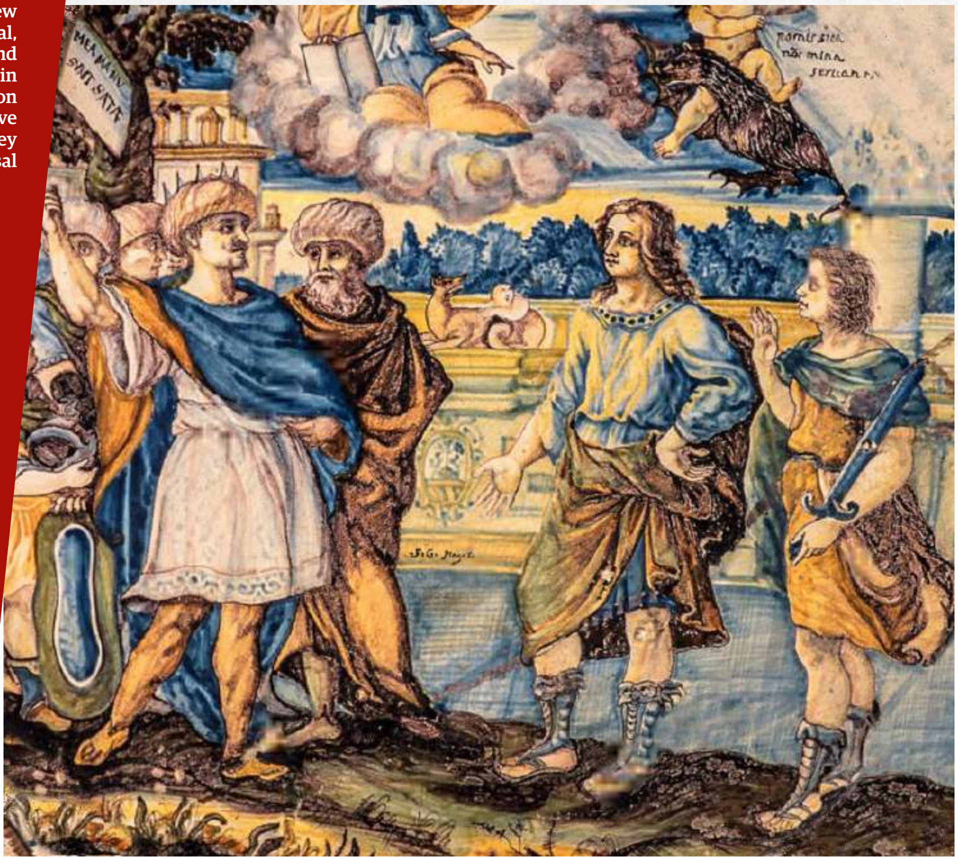


The new Spartan admiral, Lysander, found a true friend in Darius II's son Cyrus, who gave him all the money at his disposal

BATTLE OF AEGOSPOTAMI

In 405, with Lysander blockading the Hellespont and now bearing down on the Bosporus, defeating his navy was a matter of survival. Wasting no time, the Athenians sent a fleet to their base at Sestos before sailing 12 miles up the Hellespont to Aegospotami, a small town with no harbour – and too few resources to sustain the Athenian army. Here, six Athenian generals rotated leadership on a daily basis, trying to figure out how to draw Lysander into a battle he had no intention of fighting.

Having watched the standoff for four days, the exiled Alcibiades descended from his fortress on the Gallipoli Peninsula, offering the Athenians advice and claiming two Thracian kings had pledged him their support. However, they bluntly told him to leave, adding that "they were the generals now, and not he".

On the fifth day, a general called Philocles attempted to lure Lysander away with a small detachment of 30 ships, hoping to then ambush him with the larger force. However, the Spartan reacted swiftly, cutting off and routing the detachment, before turning on the larger fleet. In the ensuing chaos, the Spartans destroyed all but ten of the Athenian ships. With that, the Athenian navy had been decimated, and they had no money to rebuild another. They had lost the war.

and even drinking water, they were repelled by the Syracusan cavalry. To make matters worse, when the notorious Athenian general Alcibiades was condemned to death for his alleged role in breaking the genitals off statues of Hermes in the capital, he defected to Sparta. Growing his hair long, he warned them, "Let no one believe you are deliberating only about Sicily, for the fate of the Peloponnesus is also at stake."

Convinced, the Spartans sent a small force of 3,000 men and 200 cavalry under the leadership of Gylippus. While his army frustrated the Athenians, building a wall to counter their own siege works, another laid waste to Attica, this time fortifying the area. The Thebans ransacked the Athenian heartland with particular enthusiasm, stripping homes even of their tiles and wood.

Back in Sicily, the Syracusans heard how the Corinthians had attached catheads (wooden beams) to the bows of their ships, using them to smash an Athenian fleet to bits. Adopting the idea, the Syracusans attacked the Athenian fleet at the Great Harbour. After a few days of fighting, the Syracusans pretended to retreat for dinner, only to then attack the Athenians while they were eating, chasing off their fleet with ships of javelinmen. Though Demosthenes arrived with a second army, the Sicilian campaign ended in defeat, with 40,000 Athenians fleeing their ships, Demosthenes being captured while attempting suicide and thousands being hacked down in a river.

With most of Athens' top brass dead, Sparta extorting money and holding hostages across central Greece and Alcibiades inciting revolt in Ionia, rebellion spread like wildfire across the Delian League. When Chios and Erythrae asked the Peloponnesians to help eject the Athenians, the Persian king, Darius II, sensed an opportunity. His satrap, Tissaphernes, agreed to finance the Spartan war effort in return for Persia's historic Greek holdings. Strapped for cash, the Athenians, meanwhile, dipped into their emergency reserves, sending a fleet of 101 warships to blockade Chios.

However, when Euboea (where Athens had hidden its livestock) broke out in revolt, the Athenians shifted their attention back home. This allowed the Spartans to sail for Miletus, using belated Persian funds to finance a land army and ignite a revolt across the Hellespont. Alcibiades, who had fallen out of favour with the Spartans and left with Tissaphernes, told the Athenians that if they abandoned democracy, he would bring the Persians to their side. Though he was largely ignored, he had inspired an Athenian oligarch faction to assassinate scores of leading democrats before bursting into the council house with daggers and overthrowing the Council of Five Hundred. However, when someone leaked their plans to betray Athens to the Spartans, they too were promptly replaced with the Five Thousand.

The Athenian return to democracy was commemorated at Cyzicus, where a returning Alcibiades helped lead the Athenians to victory over the Spartan fleet before convincing loyalists in the rebellious city of Byzantium to open their gates to his army. Emboldened, the Athenians rejected a Spartan peace treaty, hoping to woo the Persians to their side. However, their plans were dashed when Darius sent his son Cyrus to fight alongside the new Spartan general, Lysander - the son of a poor Spartan father and a helot mother who had risen through the ranks on the back of his martial prowess. The two immediately hit it off, with Cyrus offering all the money at his disposal - funds that allowed the Spartans to lure the best crewmen away from Athens.

Undeterred, Alcibiades brought a fleet of 80 ships to the port of Notium, on the Ionian coast, to meet Lysander's 90. After waiting a month for the Spartans to take the bait, he moved on, leaving a petty officer in charge with the simple instruction, "Do not attack Lysander's ships." No sooner had he left than the officer attacked. Lysander not only devastated the Athenian fleet but annihilated Alcibiades' ships when he returned three days later. It would be Alcibiades' final undoing, forcing him into exile once again to a fort he built on the Gallipoli peninsula.

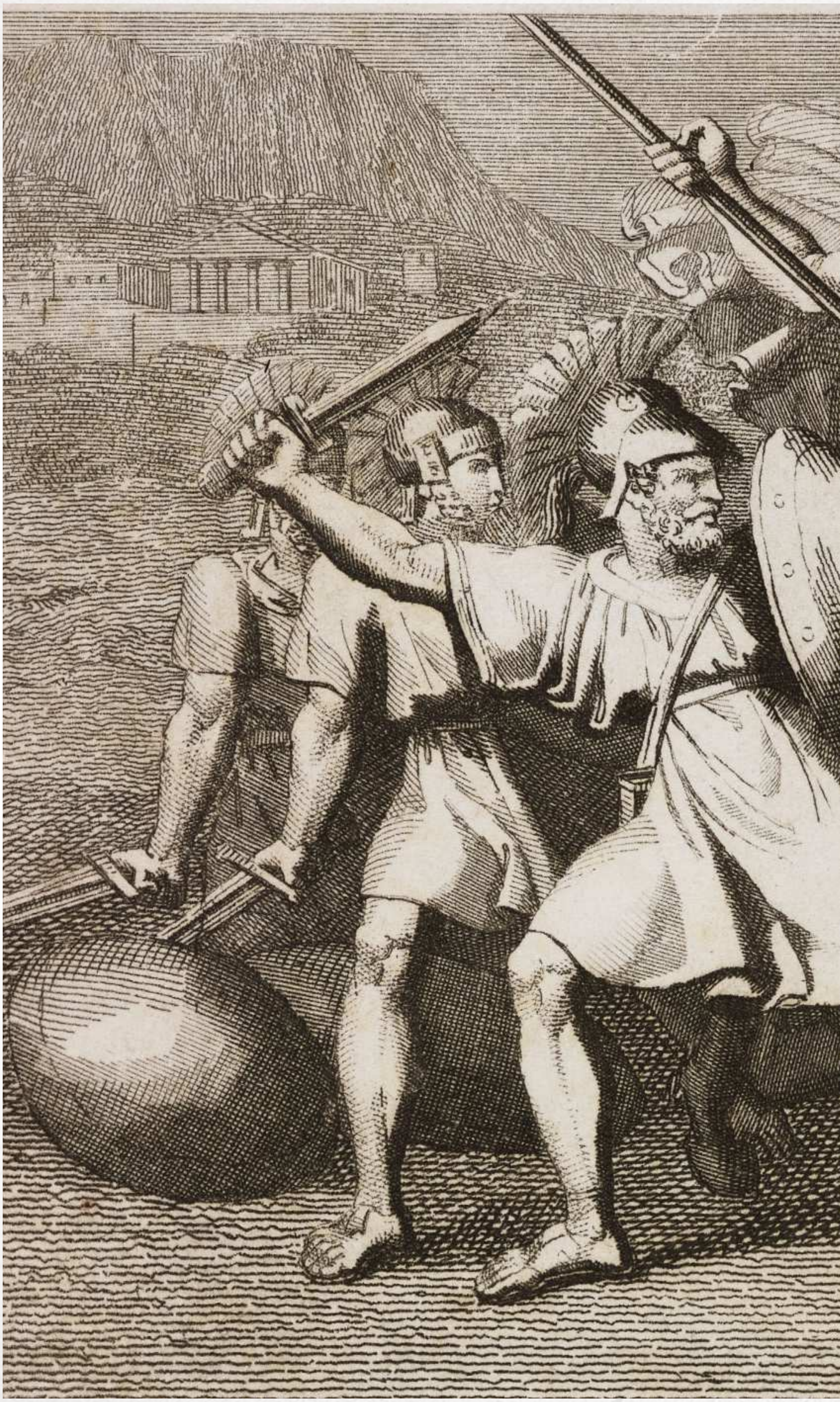
Upon hearing the general Conon had escaped with just 40 ships, Athens desperately rebuilt a fleet of 110 in a month, frantically melting down golden statues of Nike for coinage. The ships were manned by farmers and slaves, the latter having been promised citizenship for their service. Remarkably, by the time it reached the Spartan fleet of 120 at Arginusae, the Athenian navy had amassed 155 ships. At the ensuing battle, the Athenians aligned their triremes in three divisions, with deep wings and an island behind the centre, thereby denying the Spartans an opportunity to pull off a diekplous manoeuvre, which exploited gaps between ships. The result was a decisive victory for Athens.

Despite winning what Diodorus described as "the greatest naval battle in the history of Greeks against Greeks", the Athenian victory was tarnished by the navy's failure to recover either the living or the dead. Outraged, the assembly called all the generals to face trial, voting to put all eight to death.

After Arginusae, the impoverished Spartans sent one more peace offering to the Athenians. Athens refused - this war was total, and victory must be such.

Though the Spartan constitution forbade an admiral from serving more than once, the worried Spartans simply nominated the brilliant Lysander a vice admiral instead. Having been summoned to court, Cyrus appointed Lysander the satrap of Sardis in his place, giving him access to all public funds and allowing him to collect tribute. All he asked in return was that he refrain from attacking the Athenians until he returned. In Cyrus' absence,

"IT WOULD BE ALCIBIADES' FINAL UNDOING, FORCING HIM INTO EXILE ONCE AGAIN"



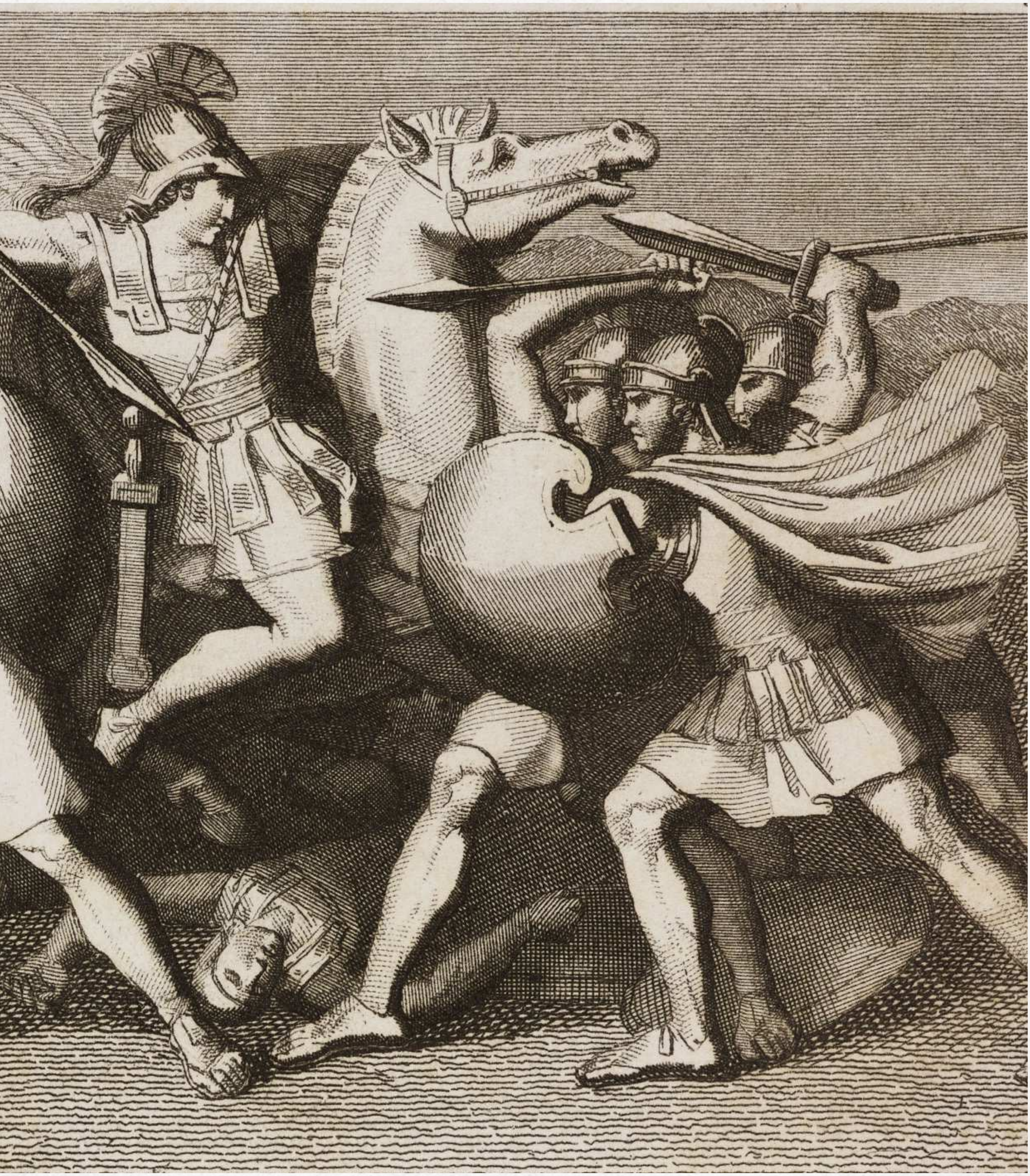
At the Battle of Delium, Socrates served as an Athenian hoplite alongside the cavalryman and future general Alcibiades

Lysander murdered the anti-Persian elites in Miletus and replaced their democracy with an oligarchy, justifying it by stating, "Where the lion's skin will not reach, it must be patched with the fox's." With the Athenians now lacking any military leadership, all they could do was look on as he razed the cities of Caria and Rhodes and raided Aegina and Salamis before blockading the Hellespont and making his way towards the crucial Propontis.

There, he dealt the Athenians a critical blow at the Battle of Aegospotami, wiping out the entire Athenian navy. The Athenians had never been merciful in victory; devastating cities, massacring citizens, throwing all captives overboard after one battle, and cutting off the right hands of others after another. Given how tremendously their allies had suffered at Athenian hands, the Spartans had no choice but to put their 4,000 Athenian prisoners to death. Yet despite the carnage, Lysander followed up by offering fair treaties to Athens' allies, eager to strip his enemy of its trade partners before besieging the city itself. He even allowed Athenian garrisons and officials to return to the city, knowing this would put a bigger strain on its resources.

While the furious Thebans suggested "the city be levelled and the countryside left as pasture for sheep", the Spartans instead insisted the Athenians surrender their empire, hand over their fleet and tear down their walls. In March 404, after 27 years of bloodshed, the Athenians finally acquiesced, bringing the war to a close. The Spartans arrived later that month and "with great zeal they set about tearing down the walls to the music of flute-girls, thinking that this day was the beginning of freedom for the Greeks".

Victory delivered hegemony to the Spartans, and they imposed a puppet regime of Thirty Tyrants on Athens, a brief reign marked by property confiscation and indiscriminate judicial murder. The Thirty were overthrown in 403, and just ten years later the Athenians would rebuild their fleet and walls. Within three decades Athens would regain many of its former allies, and the Peloponnesian League would be dismantled. However, having exhausted one another, all the Greeks would soon be subjugated by a mutual enemy - the Macedonians. All, save for the city of Sparta.



GREEK WARSHIPS

TRIREMES – THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING MACHINES

FIRST USED in the 8th century BCE, the trireme was a state-of-the-art military machine. Fast and agile, triremes were designed to exert maximum power during military engagements.

Both the Greeks and the Phoenicians employed these ships for military and trading purposes - its name is derived from its ability to seat three levels of rowers who were positioned on both sides of the vessel. Triremes played an essential role in the Persian wars, becoming an important symbol of Greek military capability. By the 5th century BCE these ships came to dominate the waters around the eastern Mediterranean.

Construction began with the hull. Later, the builders added wooden ribs in order to strengthen the vessel. These were reinforced with ropes that were fitted to the keel and stretched tightly over the timber. The ships were built with soft woods - namely pine and fir - while larch was employed for the interior of the vessel, the keel was made of oak.

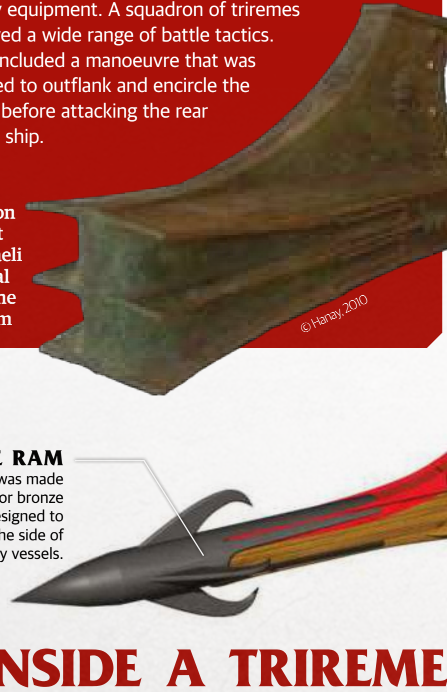
The crew consisted of 200 men, which included the hard-pressed rowers, a marine corp (comprising archers and spearmen) and a deck crew who were under the command of the helmsman.

Due to its design the trireme was meant to undertake short, swift operations. At night, the ships would pull into harbour, where the crew would be able to collect fresh water and store it for the next stage of the journey.

Primary propulsion came from the oarsmen, with each man operating one oar. While the ship was designed with two masts, its steering was controlled by two large paddles that were positioned at the stern. It is believed that the trireme could sail at six to eight knots; the distance it travelled depended on the weather and its manpower. In favourable conditions, it was thought that oarsmen were able to propel the ship 80 or 96 kilometres over a seven-hour period.

BATTLE TACTICS

Athenian military operations depended on their close-quarters battle tactics, namely the ramming and boarding of enemy ships. The ram of a trireme was built at the front of the ship, thereby creating a large metal horn. When the ship attacked it would come in from the stern and attempt to rupture the hull of an enemy ship. A small number of marines were placed on the deck of the ship. They would defend or attack, attempting to board the enemy vessel armed with shields, spears and archery equipment. A squadron of triremes employed a wide range of battle tactics. These included a manoeuvre that was designed to outflank and encircle the enemy before attacking the rear of their ship.



A ram on show at the Israeli National Maritime Museum

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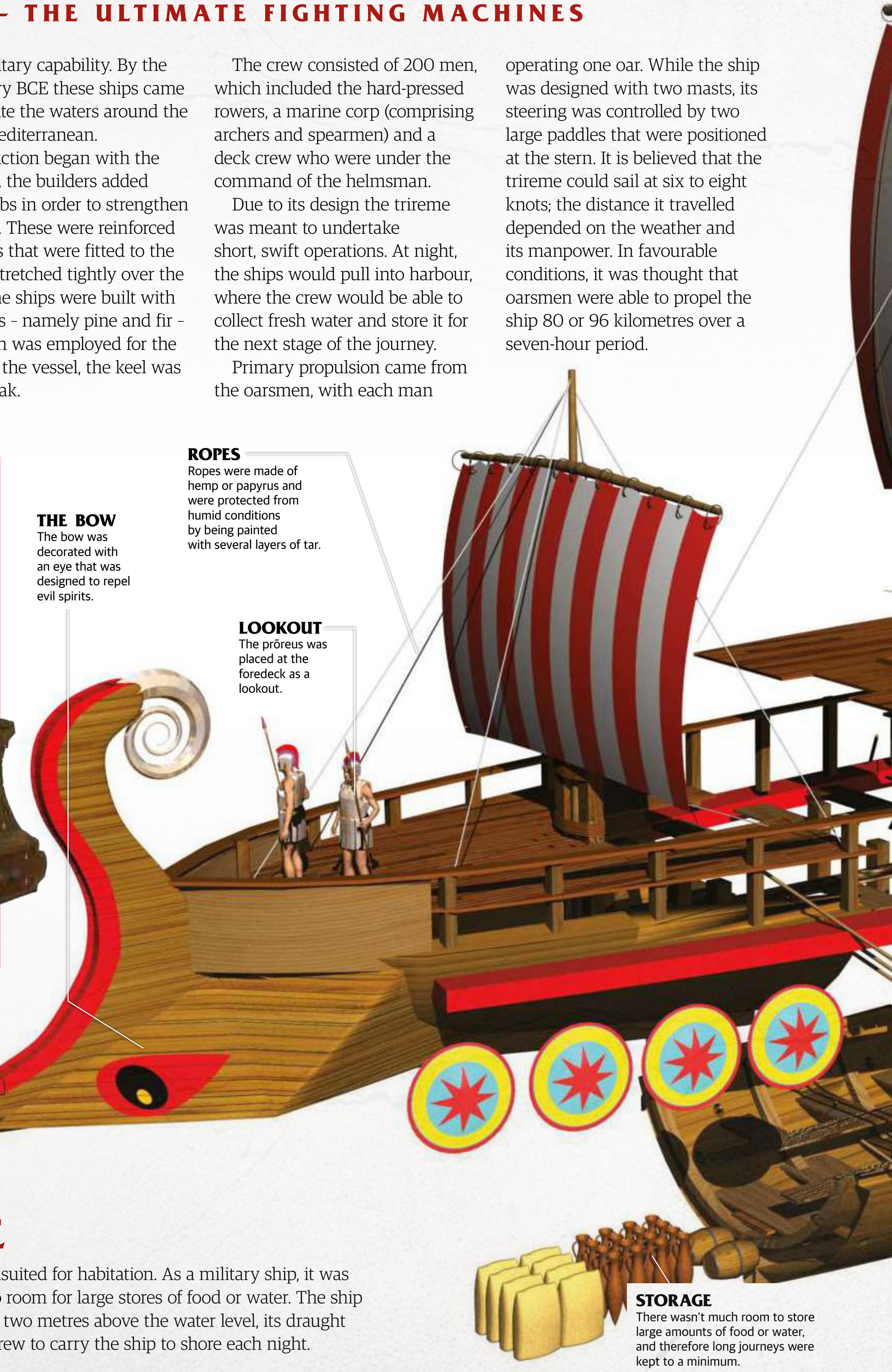

ROPES
Ropes were made of hemp or papyrus and were protected from humid conditions by being painted with several layers of tar.

THE BOW
The bow was decorated with an eye that was designed to repel evil spirits.

LOOKOUT
The prōreus was placed at the foredeck as a lookout.

THE RAM
The ram was made of copper or bronze and was designed to rupture the side of enemy vessels.

STORAGE
There wasn't much room to store large amounts of food or water, and therefore long journeys were kept to a minimum.

INSIDE A TRIREME

The trireme was a long, narrow vessel highly unsuited for habitation. As a military ship, it was not designed for long journeys and there was no room for large stores of food or water. The ship was designed so the height of the hull rose only two metres above the water level, its draught was shallow and its keel was flat, allowing the crew to carry the ship to shore each night.

THE OARSMEN

Rowers consisted not of slaves but of free men and hired foreigners. The oarsmen were divided into three groups. The thranitai occupied the top section of the ship – a position that was relatively comfortable in comparison with conditions below. However, added strength and agility was required of these men. The middle section, who were known as the zygitai, rowed directly beneath the thranitai although at a slightly different angle, while the lowest set of rowers, the thalamitai, were seated in dismal surroundings at the bottom of the ship. The heat here was intense. The oarsmen were particularly vulnerable during enemy engagement and if the rowers were captured, the enemy would dismember their thumbs or cut off their hands. Moreover, if they were trapped below deck during a hostile encounter they risked drowning.

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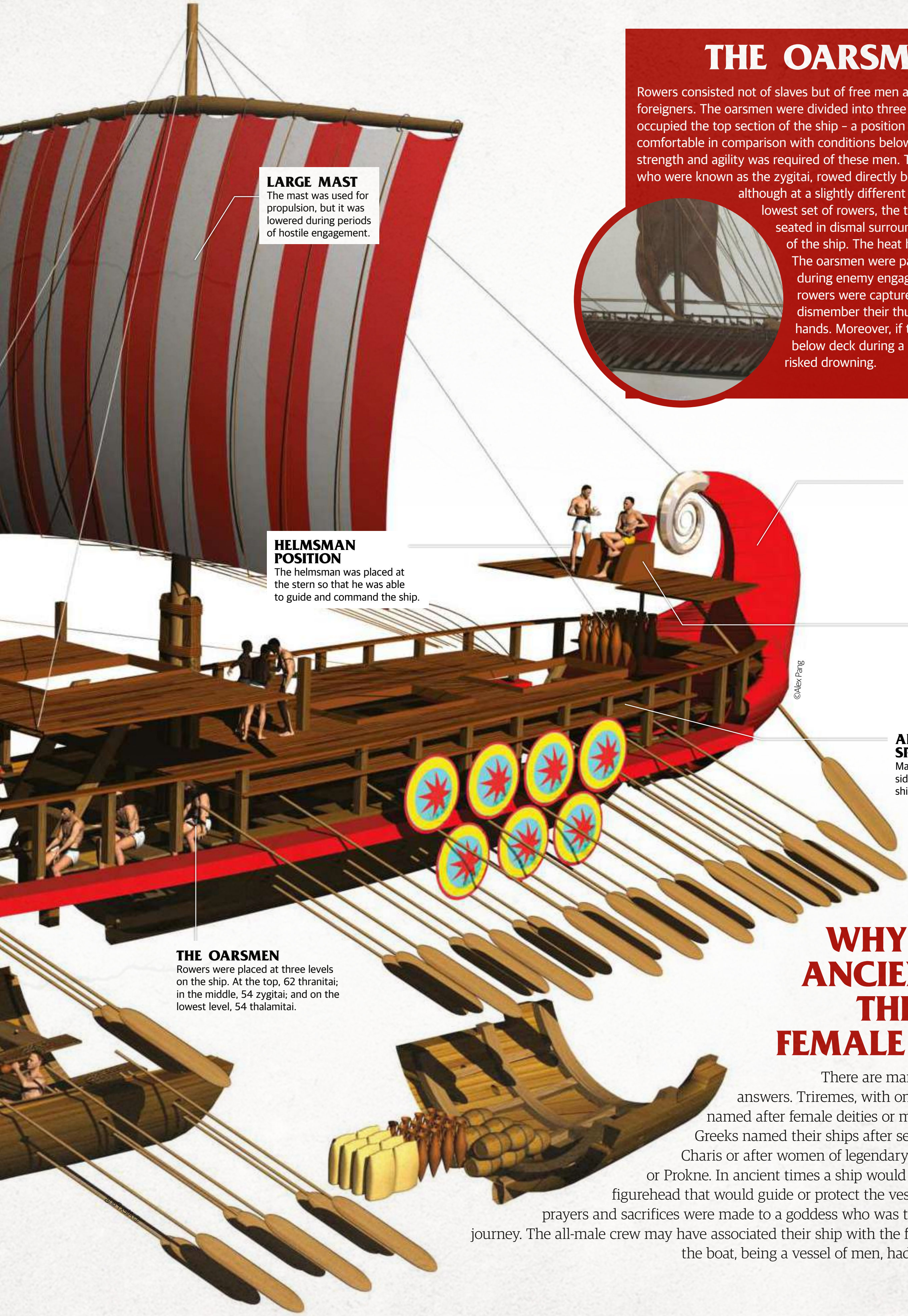

LARGE MAST
The mast was used for propulsion, but it was lowered during periods of hostile engagement.

HELMSMAN POSITION
The helmsman was placed at the stern so that he was able to guide and command the ship.

THE AKROSTOLIO
To complement the bow, the stern was designed with a tail so that the ship resembled a mythological sea monster.

CAPTAIN'S SEAT
The seat was located at the rear of the ship for the benefit of the commanding officer.

©Alex Pang

ARCHERS AND SPEARMEN
Marines were placed along each side of the vessel to protect the ship during battle.

THE OARSMEN
Rowers were placed at three levels on the ship. At the top, 62 thranitai; in the middle, 54 zygitai; and on the lowest level, 54 thalamitai.

WHY DID THE ANCIENTS GIVE THEIR SHIPS FEMALE NAMES?

There are many theories and no clear answers. Triremes, with only rare exceptions, were named after female deities or mythological figures. The Greeks named their ships after sea nymphs like Thetis or Charis or after women of legendary courage, such as Danae or Prokne. In ancient times a ship would also sail under a female figurehead that would guide or protect the vessel – before leaving port prayers and sacrifices were made to a goddess who was thought to safeguard the journey. The all-male crew may have associated their ship with the female shape and form – the boat, being a vessel of men, had clear female principles.

DECLINE & LEGACY

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Meet the tactician who engineered Sparta's first major defeat and shattered forever the illusion of her invincibility

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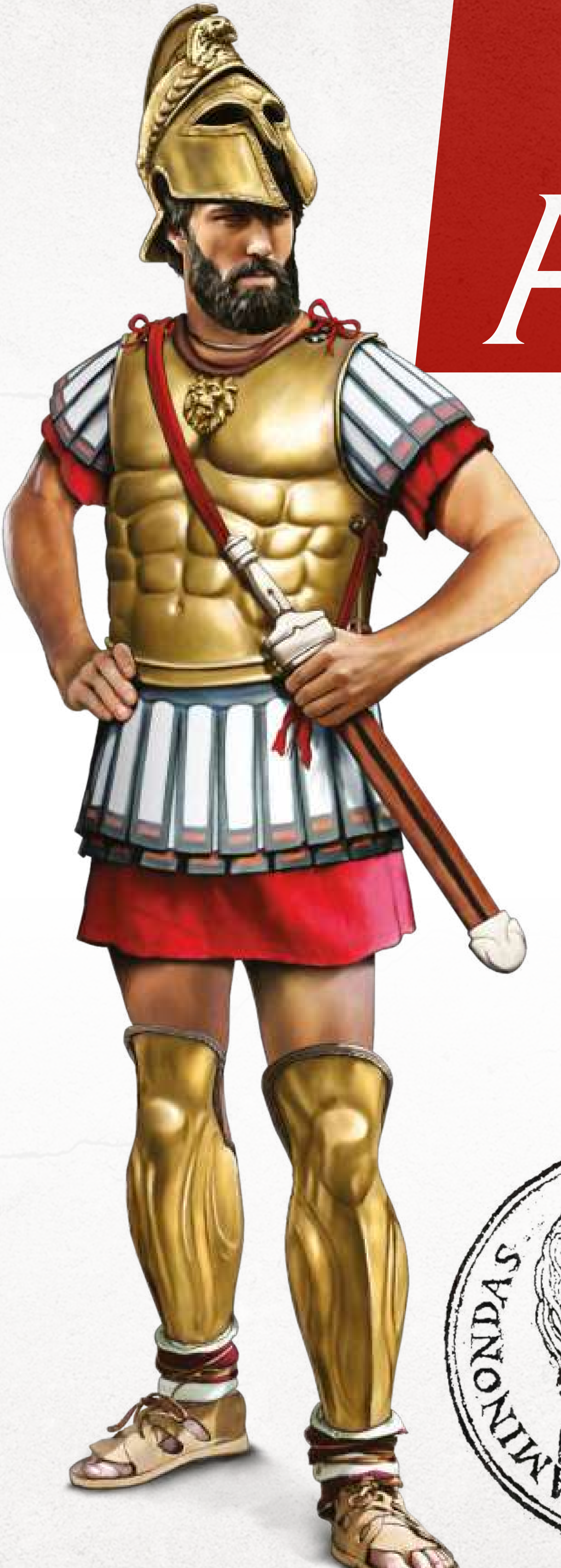
EPAMINONDAS

SPARTA'S NEMESIS

EPAMINONDAS OF THEBES IS ONE OF THE GREATEST AND MOST REVOLUTIONARY COMMANDERS IN MILITARY HISTORY, DESTROYING THE MIGHT OF SPARTA IN A SINGLE DAY

WORDS BY • **MURRAY DAHM**



AT THE Battle of Leuctra in 371 BCE, Epaminondas led the outnumbered Theban phalanx to an overwhelming victory against an army of Spartan hoplites. The Thebans' triumph that day forever changed the political map of Greece. In order to achieve this, Epaminondas had created a military revolution that would indelibly change warfare. His tactics and strategies are studied and implemented to this day, yet the man himself remains a figure of some mystery and controversy.

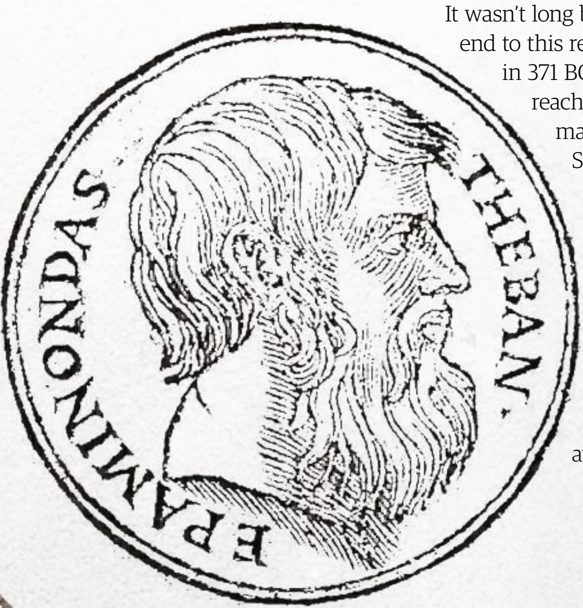
PRELUDE

In the aftermath of the victory in the Peloponnesian War against Athens (431-404 BCE), Sparta sought to impose its will on all of Greece. This included several states in the plains of Boeotia – an area over which the city of Thebes considered itself the natural leader. Despite having supported Sparta against Athens, Thebes switched its support to Athens and led an anti-Spartan coalition of cities that was able to achieve some success against Sparta in the Corinthian War (395-387 BCE).

With the peace of 387 BCE, known as 'The King's Peace' because it was underwritten by the Persian King Artaxerxes II, all Greek states were to remain autonomous city-states. The Persians also backed the authority of Sparta and helped to establish them as the dominant force in Greece.

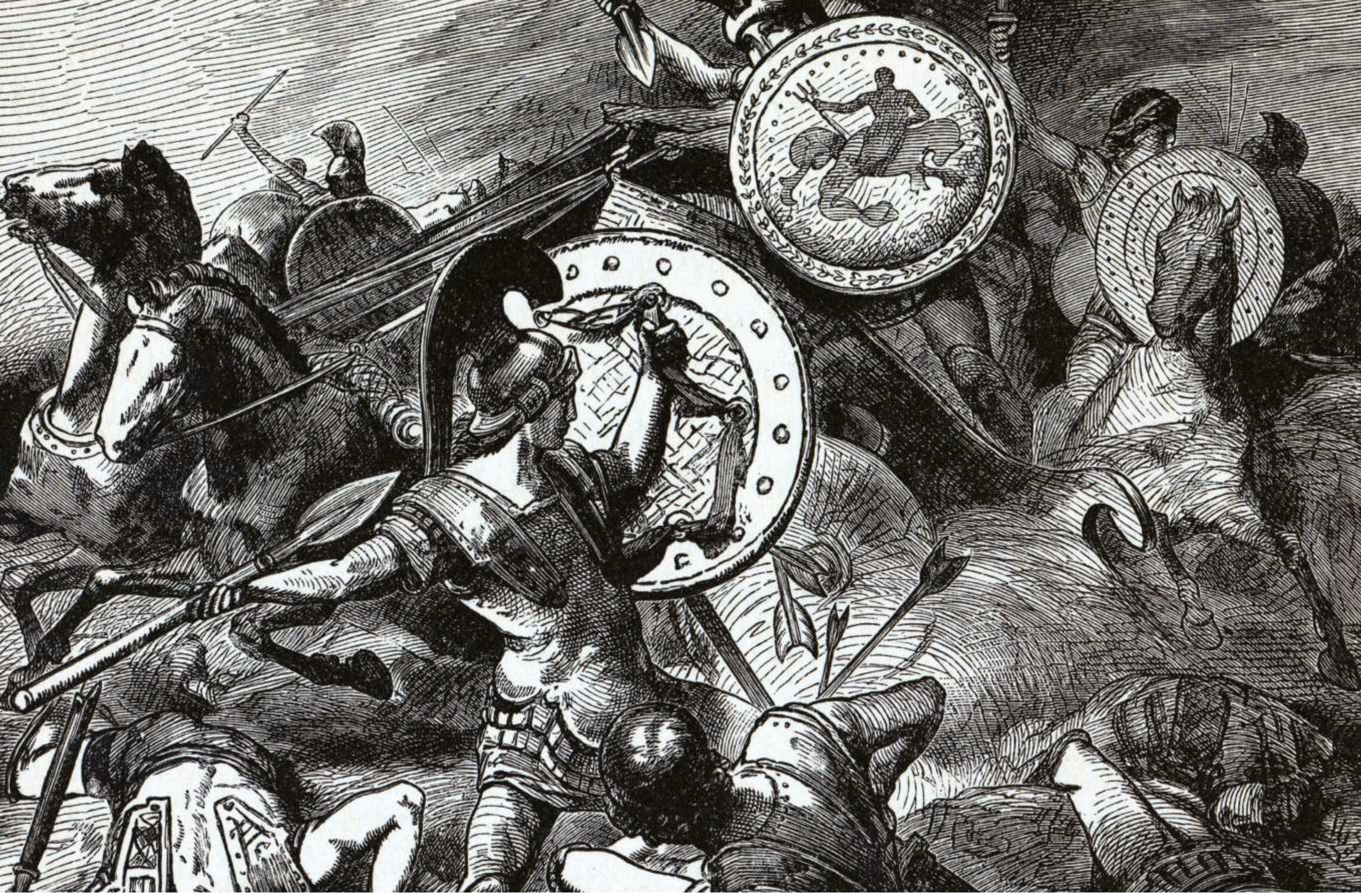
Buoyed by this foreign support, Sparta proceeded to attack the supposedly autonomous city-states of Greece under the pretext that they threatened the peace. In 383 BCE a coup in Thebes led to the establishment of a pro-Spartan oligarchy and the installation of a garrison. Four years later an anti-Spartan coup led by Pelopidas overthrew this regime and re-established the city as the dominant force in Boeotia. Thebes then consolidated power in the region by creating the Boeotian League, a coalition of cities with Thebes at its head. Thebes became the champion of a free Greece against the tyranny of Sparta.

It wasn't long before Sparta moved to put an end to this resistance. Despite negotiations in 371 BCE, peace could not be reached, and King Cleombrotus marched at the head of a Spartan-Peloponnesian army to crush Thebes.


EPAMINONDAS THEBAN.

A HERO EMERGES

Epaminondas' role in Thebes' return to freedom and ascendancy is difficult to pinpoint. This is partially down to a problem with available sources. The life of



Epaminondas as written by Plutarch does not survive, and several other writers (especially Xenophon, whose history the *Hellenica* is vital for the period) show a distinctly anti-Theban bias. Several aspects of Epaminondas' life are tied up within ongoing cademic debates.

What we do know is that Epaminondas was vitally important to Theban politics, warfare and history in the period 371-362 BCE, and a vast array of fragmentary and anecdotal accounts reinforce this importance. We also have traces of him in other sources that do survive, such as Plutarch's *Life of Pelopidas* and *Life of Agesilaus* and in Cornelius Nepos' *Book of Great Generals of Foreign Nations*.

Epaminondas was one of the liberators who overthrew the pro-Spartan government at Thebes, although he is not named by Xenophon – who equally does not name Pelopidas, despite him being the ringleader of the uprising. This highlights the problem with Xenophon, who is otherwise reliable. His version of Theban history, however, can be seriously questioned, and his accounts of Epaminondas, Pelopidas and the defeat of Sparta are unreliable. Xenophon was pro-Spartan in all his writings, which seems to have seriously affected his judgement.

Epaminondas was the leader of the Theban peace delegation at Sparta in 371 BCE and then in the Leuctra campaign, and it is clear he was already respected as a leader and speaker by this point. We are told that he was the best speaker in Thebes and, using widespread sources, we are able to piece together a picture.

His father Polymnis was from an honourable Theban family although one of little wealth. Nonetheless, Epaminondas was educated as well as any other Theban. We know that he never took advantage of his more wealthy friends , such as Pelopidas, and refused their offers of financial help. He was also impervious to attempted bribes made by various cities and individuals. He learned to play the lyre, to sing and dance and studied athletics and wrestling. All of these, we are told, he saw could have a military application. Cornelius Nepos in *Epaminondas* tells us that he thought agility would be useful in warfare rather than just physical strength. There are later anecdotes from Polyaenus of him encouraging the Theban hoplites to train in wrestling.

Nepos lists his many qualities: prudent, serious, a lover of the truth, self-controlled, kindly. His listed attributes are so many that we must suspect the tradition that survives in Nepos is panegyric. Epaminondas also studied philosophy and is rated by several authors as a military philosopher with only one rival – Socrates, a man hailed as the founder of Western philosophy.

Perhaps the earliest event for which we have an account of Epaminondas is him saving the life of his colleague and friend Pelopidas at Mantinea in 385 BCE. This parallels Socrates saving Alcibiades' life at the Battle of Potidaea.

"EPAMINONDAS ALSO STUDIED PHILOSOPHY AND IS RATED BY SEVERAL AUTHORS AS A MILITARY PHILOSOPHER WITH ONLY ONE RIVAL – SOCRATES"

Plutarch tells us that Epaminondas defended his friend's body even though he thought Pelopidas was already dead.

This bonded the two together for life. Pelopidas was not only prominent in the overthrowing of Spartan power but was also the first commander of the elite Theban hoplite force, the Heiros Lochos, or Sacred Band. This force comprised of 300 Theban hoplites paid by the state to dedicate themselves to war, just as their Spartan adversaries did. They were probably established in the aftermath of the liberation. One tradition names Epaminondas as the founder of this unit, although another names Gorgidas, one of the other conspirators against Spartan power. We should be wary that Epaminondas' later importance may mean that he was given credit for all manner of events to which his connection may have been small.

The Sacred Band is itself obscured by conflicting sources, since several writers name it as comprising 150 pairs of homosexual lovers who would fight furiously for each other. Other writers do not mention this recruitment requirement, and Xenophon refuses to name the unit altogether. Nonetheless, the Sacred Band was prominent in several of Thebes' most important battles, including Tegyra in 375 BCE, Leuctra in 371 BCE and Mantinea in 362 BCE. They died to the last man facing the forces of Philip II of Macedon at Chaeronea in 338 BCE.

LEUCTRA

The Battle of Leuctra is one of the most discussed in the ancient sources. There are four lengthy accounts of the battle - more than for any other important ancient battle - by Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, Xenophon and Pausanias. Unfortunately, among these four accounts there is confusion and disagreement, and working out what actually happened - and why the sources disagree - is complicated. There is also a plethora of minor and anecdotal accounts, which can add to the overall picture of the battle.

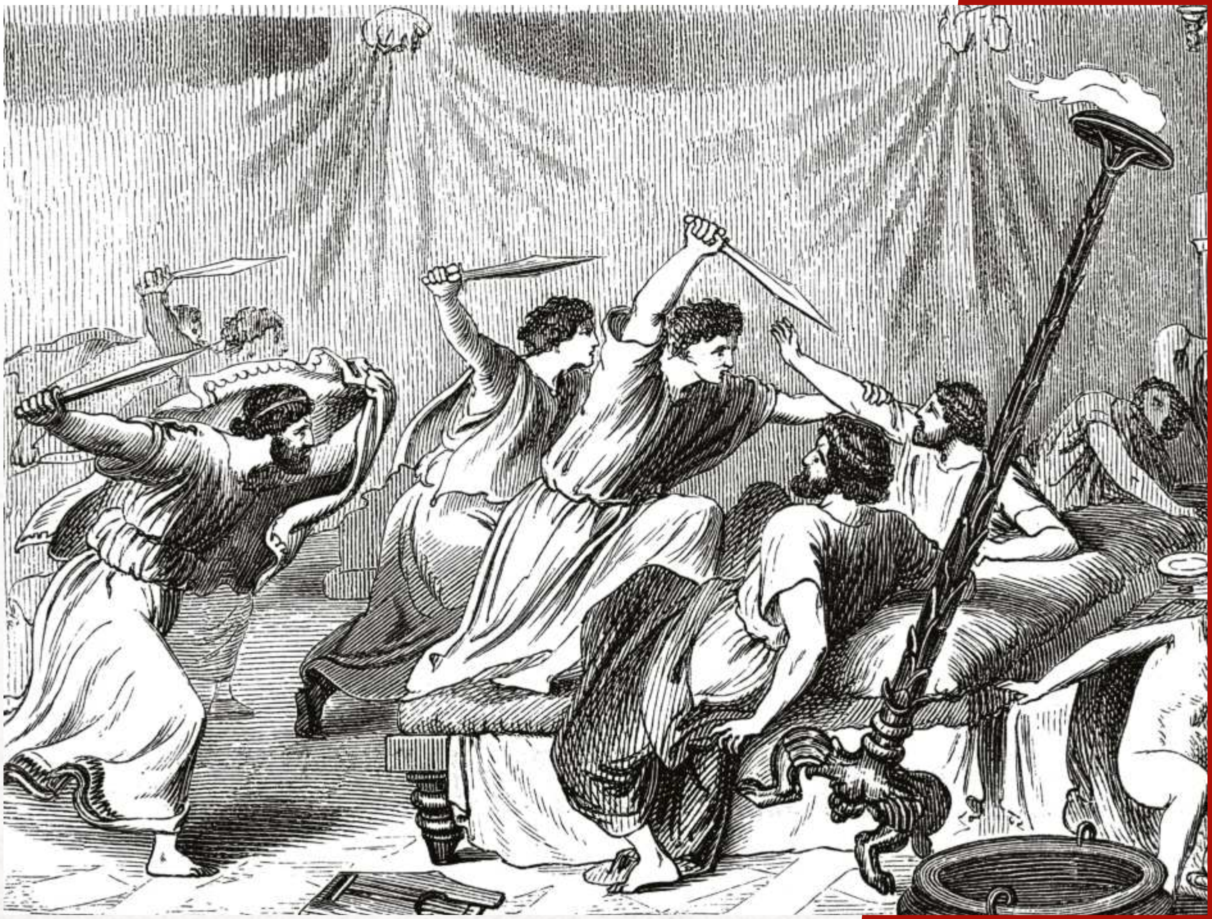
The differences in the accounts are such that they cannot be reconciled without disregarding one or another of them. Xenophon paints a reasonable picture of the battle but gives no credit to the Thebans or Epaminondas, and he contradicts the picture from our other sources. Disregarding Xenophon, all the other surviving sources preserve a cohesive picture of the battle and Epaminondas' role in it.

Epaminondas had been elected Boeotarch for the campaign - these were the elected leaders of the Boeotian League. There were 11 Boeotarchs: four came from Thebes itself and

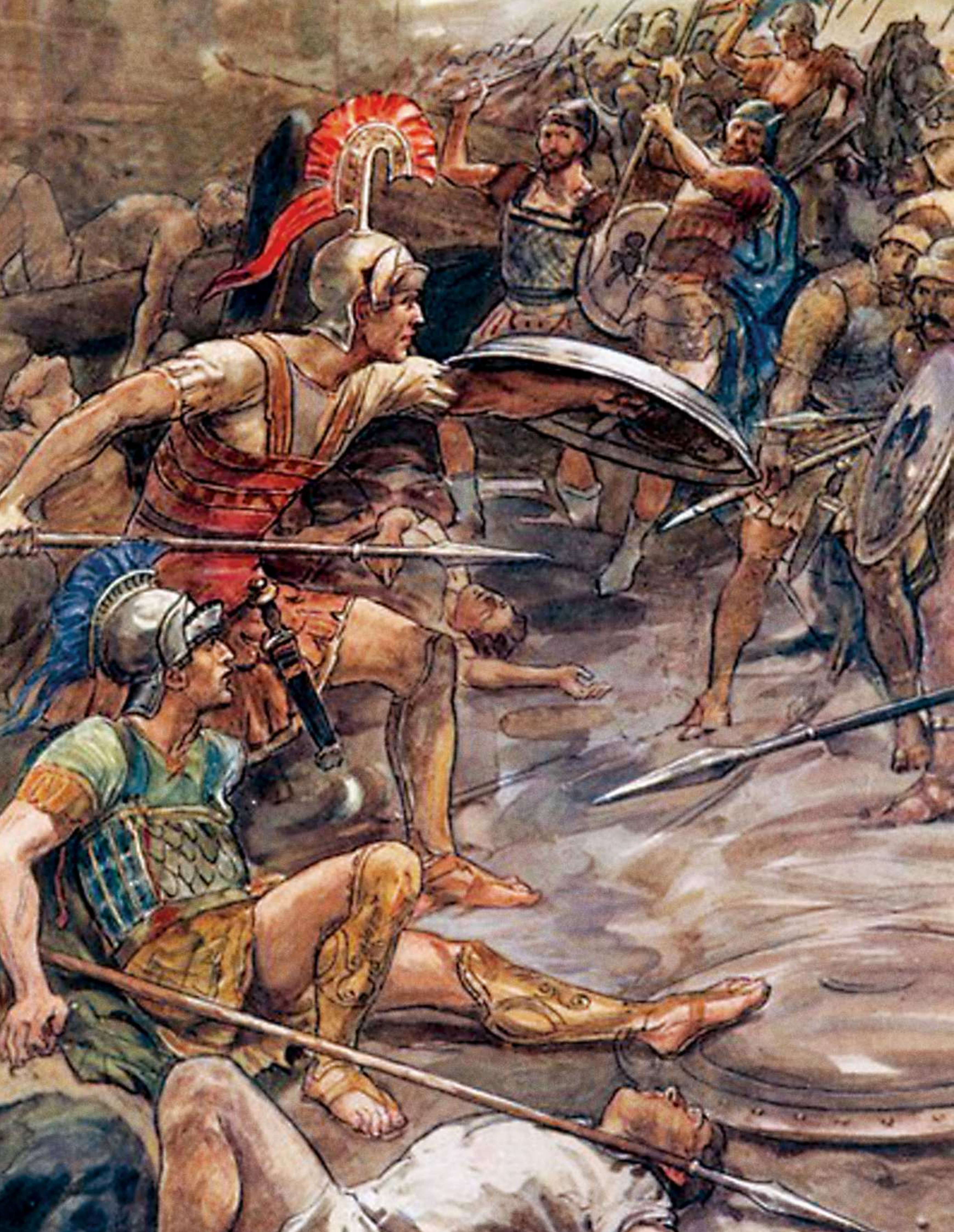
THE MILITARY PHILOSOPHER

The figure of Epaminondas is shrouded in mystery despite his importance and a rich anecdotal tradition regarding his outlook on life. His death heralded the end of Theban dominance and very little evidence of his life survives. Alexander the Great would raze Thebes to the ground 30 years later, which probably destroyed yet more evidence. Several important literary sources also do not survive, which hampers us yet further, and no description is available.

We do know, however, that Epaminondas was impoverished, despite being from an old aristocratic family. He embraced his straitened circumstances and made them a part of his philosophy. Indeed, he was regarded as a military philosopher who studied the lyre, singing and dance – all skills in which he saw a military application. He remained unmarried so that he could better concentrate on studying those things that brought protection and glory to Thebes.



Pelopidas and the Sacred Band violently overthrow the pro-Spartan government in Thebes



the others from the other cities in the league. Pausanias' and Diodorus' accounts make it clear that Epaminondas was regarded as the senior Theban leader and overall commander, and the tradition that attached itself to Epaminondas, which credits him with responsibility for the victory, should be trusted. What is more, it is clear that Epaminondas' plan of battle was deliberate and premeditated, not some accident of happenstance. His reputation as a military genius should never be in doubt.

On the field at Leuctra, Epaminondas drew up the Boeotian line with the Thebans themselves on the left facing the Spartan king Cleombrotus who was, as was traditional, stationed on the Spartan right. Numbers at the battle differ in all the accounts, but the consensus has come to 7,000 Boeotian hoplites (because seven Boeotarchs were present) and 700 cavalry, versus 10,000 Peloponnesians (including 700 Spartans) and 1,000 cavalry. Plutarch has 2,000 Spartans present (two-thirds of the total Spartan manpower available at the time). Other sources give a ratio of six to one in favour of Sparta to increase the impressive nature of the Theban victory.

The 300 members of the Theban Sacred Band with their commander (lochagos) Pelopidas were also stationed on the left, possibly as a front line, although their exact deployment has evaded scholars. Pelopidas led the charge and won great glory in the battle, even though he was not a Boeotarch. The remainder of the Boeotian line was drawn up obliquely or in echelon, meaning they were facing diagonally away from the massed Theban phalanx on the left. As the Theban left advanced towards Cleombrotus, therefore, the remainder of the Boeotian line would not be required to fully engage with the corresponding part of the enemy phalanx. Diodorus tells us they actually withdrew as the Spartan army advanced. The battle would be decided by the densely packed Theban phalanx's clash with the Spartan right; elite versus elite.

This is indeed what happened. The Theban phalanx, led by the Sacred Band, smashed into the Spartan right and, after a time, felled Cleombrotus and much of his Spartiate bodyguard. After this the Peloponnesian line broke and fled from the field.

Plutarch and Xenophon tell us that 1,000 Spartans fell in the battle – a huge blow to Spartan manpower and one from which they could not recover: Spartan boys trained in warfare from childhood, and losing that many men in a single engagement crippled the city as a military force. Other accounts have larger numbers – as high as 4,000 Peloponnesian dead. Losses on the Theban side range from just 47 to 300.

Summaries of the battle suggest that such an event and its significance had never before been seen. While it is true that Sparta had been defeated in battle before, it had never lost such a significant proportion of her manpower in one battle. What is more, the Spartans had broken and fled, something that had never been recorded before and showed that the Spartans were just as fallible as ordinary men. The damage to the Spartan reputation was perhaps more harmful than that to its manpower. Sparta was not destroyed, however, and still represented a tyrannical presence (according to 'freedom-loving' Thebans) in Greece. Epaminondas' next actions showed how far-reaching his plan was: he wanted the complete overthrow of Spartan power.

THE THEBAN HEGEMONY

There has always been criticism that when Thebes defeated Sparta at the Battle of Leuctra it had no real plan to replace the Spartan domination of Greece with its own. Hence the Theban hegemony of Greece was short lived and lasted barely a decade. One consideration is that Thebes only sought to end Spartan domination, not replace it. By achieving that it actually created a power vacuum, which would eventually be filled by Macedon under Philip II. But Thebes, and more importantly Epaminondas himself, did have a plan to utterly destroy Spartan domination of Greek politics, which can be seen in his next actions.

In 370 BCE Epaminondas led an invasion of the Peloponnese itself, taking advantage of grievances against the Spartans in the Peloponnese. The states of Elis and Arcadia in particular chafed at Spartan dominance, and they formed a league opposing Sparta in 370. They were soon joined by Argos.

Envoys came to Thebes and both Epaminondas and Pelopidas (both Boeotarchs for 370) persuaded the Theban government to support an alliance. The members ringed Sparta and could force Sparta to defend its homeland rather than venture further afield in Greece and therefore ensure the autonomous identity of other Greek city-states.

Epaminondas was the figure to whom the alliance looked as their leader, even though there was no official position for him to be considered as such. He and Pelopidas were keen to invade the Peloponnese itself, and so late in the year they sent 6,000 troops to oppose a punitive Spartan expedition against Arcadia. When they arrived, the Spartans had already departed Arcadia, and the opportunity to invade the Spartan homeland of Laconia presented itself.

Winter campaigns were a rarity in Greek warfare and an invasion of Sparta's homeland was even rarer. The other Theban commanders, however, realised that their commands were due to expire at the end of the year and were in favour of returning

> **“EPAMINONDAS WAS THE FIGURE TO WHOM THE ALLIANCE LOOKED AS THEIR LEADER EVEN THOUGH THERE WAS NO OFFICIAL POSITION FOR HIM TO BE CONSIDERED AS SUCH”**

The Spartans were considered a near-unbeatable force, but their defeat at Leuctra destroyed their reputation and ended their domination over Greece

home. Only Pelopidas and Epaminondas wanted to remain. Epaminondas persuaded the others to follow him and duly invaded Laconia via a four-pronged attack, advancing along all four access routes, as they could not all be defended adequately.

As the armies descended towards Sparta they came across the Eurotas River, swollen by winter rains. This proved an obstacle, but Epaminondas' army simply turned its attention to burning the settlements along its eastern bank, inflicting pain and suffering that the Spartans were more used to dealing out than experiencing themselves.

The failure of Sparta to muster an army against Epaminondas demonstrates the catastrophic manpower shortage it was suffering. The Spartans were forced to enrol their slave class, the Helots, as hoplites. 6,000 Helots joined up, but Sparta soon realised it had armed its own slaves, who could easily turn against them.

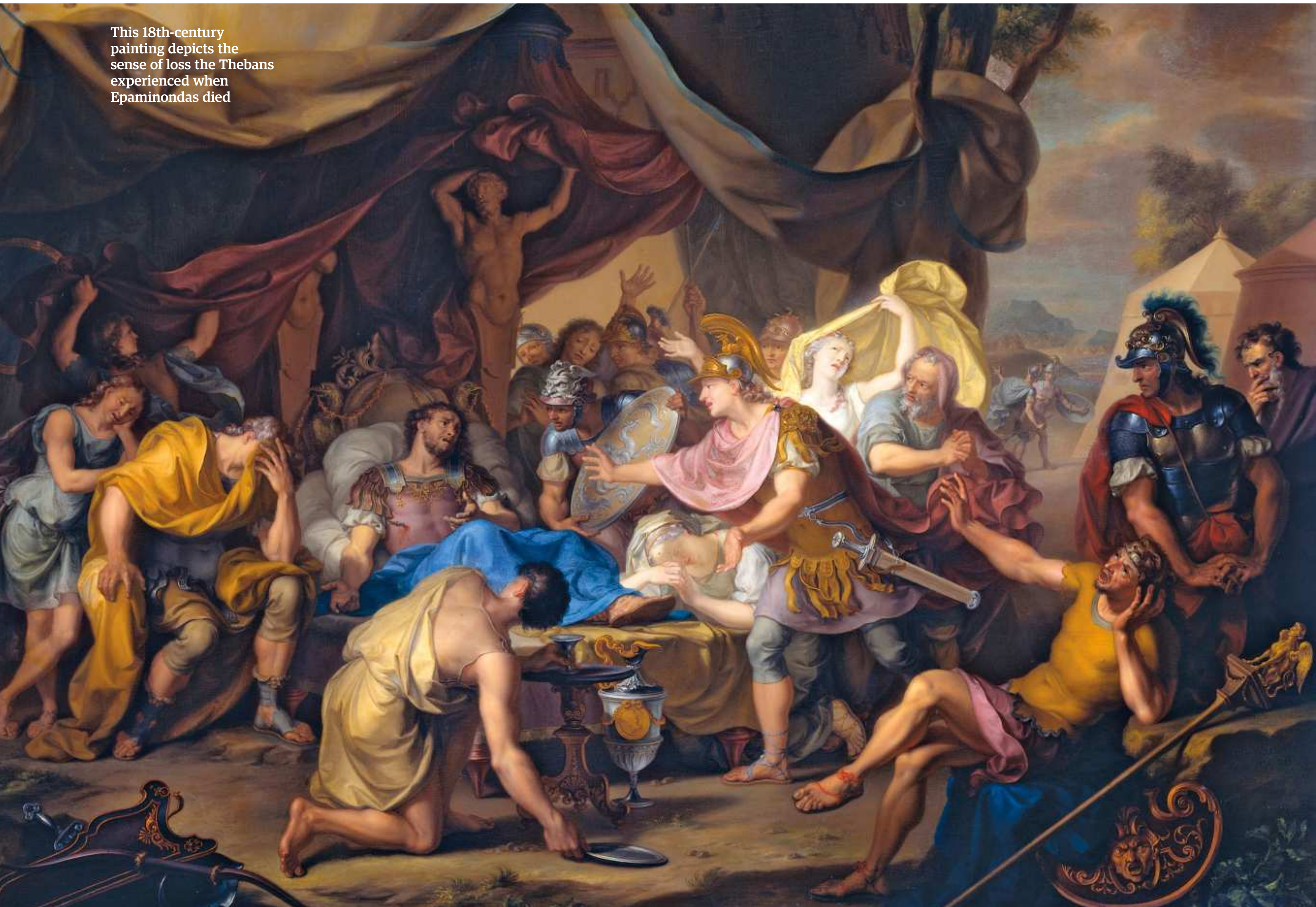
Eventually Epaminondas was able to cross the Eurotas, and he did so unopposed. He marched his army into the outskirts of Sparta itself, but the Spartan policy pursued by King Agesilaus II was not to meet him in open battle. Such a tactic was entirely un-Spartan and attests to the fear Epaminondas instilled.

Instead, Agesilaus kept his forces in garrisons and defending passes that were difficult to attack. Such a tactic left Epaminondas unable to take advantage of his huge army, which numbered 40,000. Unable to come to battle, Epaminondas decided to ravage all of Laconia and to free Messenia, the Helot homeland held under Spartan domination since the 8th century BCE. Most of the towns of Laconia were unwalled, as defence had never been necessary, and Epaminondas burned them as he went, taking ample plunder with him. Helots and other disaffected Peloponnesians flocked to his side.

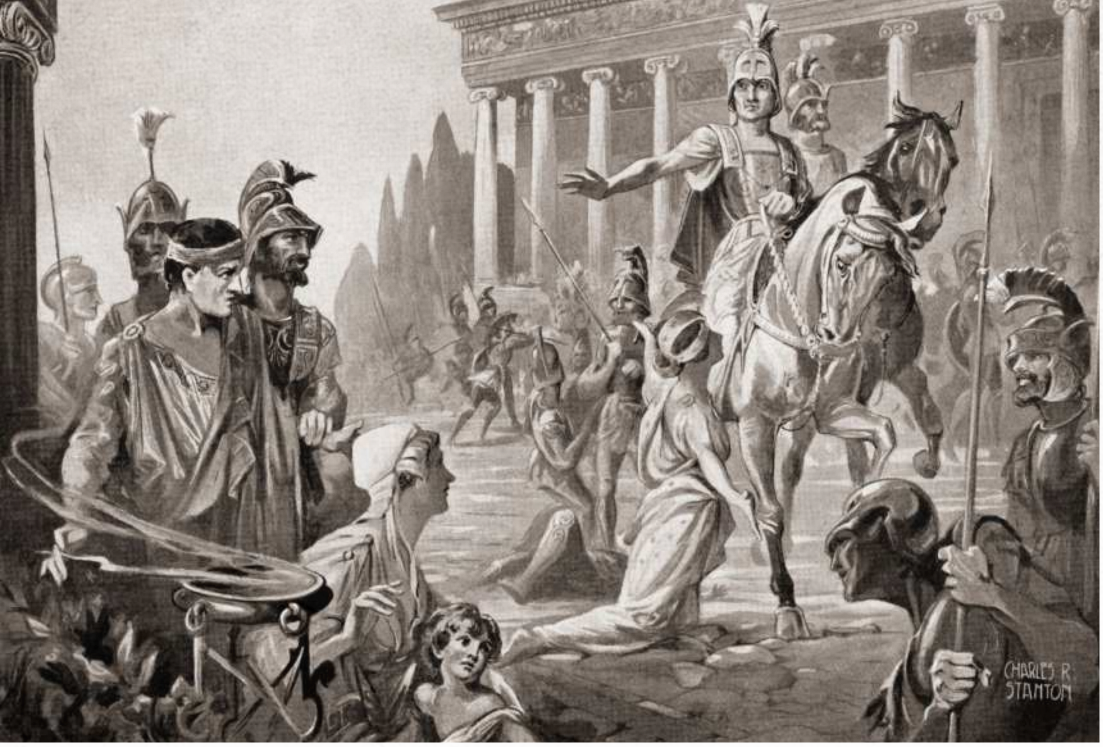
A NEW MESSENIA

In 369 BCE Epaminondas founded a new city of Messenia on the slopes of Mount Ithome to take advantage of those who opposed Spartan domination and had found not only a voice for the first time but also support - not just from Thebes but from Elis, Arcadia and Argos too. This city would be a permanent thorn in Sparta's side, deplete her manpower even further and close the ring of states opposed to Sparta. There can be little doubt that Epaminondas conceived the policy, foundation and even the location of Messenia. He sent invitations far and wide for any exiles to come to the city as a new home. It would become the focal point of resistance to Sparta. Epaminondas made sure the town was built and, when spring came in 369 BCE and the men of Elis, Argos and Arcadia departed for home, he left a garrison before departing himself for Thebes. There he was prosecuted for breaching the legality of his year-long office and continuing it into a new year. Unsurprisingly, the jury dismissed the charge.

Humiliatingly for a humbled Sparta, it was forced to seek help from its old enemy Athens, which sent men under Iphicrates. He proved no use; when he learned of Epaminondas' approach he withdrew. Epaminondas' campaign had been a huge success, achieving things never before done or even attempted.



This 18th-century painting depicts the sense of loss the Thebans experienced when Epaminondas died



Alexander the Great oversees the sacking of Thebes in 335 BCE

The establishment of Messenia all but doomed Sparta to a slow death. Even so, he had not yet met and destroyed the Spartans in open battle.

Sparta looked to cement its alliance with Athens, who, probably fearful of the growth of Theban power, gladly assented. The Peloponnesians appealed to Thebes to invade again and Epaminondas obliged. Pelopidas did not go with him, turning towards the Thessalians in the north instead. The Spartans sent their army to Corinth, who remained a Spartan ally (as did Athens) to oppose the Theban invasion.

Epaminondas, at the head of his forces, was again unable to draw the Spartan alliance out to face him in open battle – they stayed behind hastily constructed defences that barred Epaminondas' path into the Peloponnese. Undeterred, he attacked the Spartan camp at the changing of the watch and forced the defenders to retreat.

Rather than attack the outnumbered defenders, Epaminondas next chose to conclude a truce with the Spartan commander, allowing him to withdraw and give the Thebans free passage. This action actually enabled those within Thebes opposed to Epaminondas to later accuse him of treason for not inflicting casualties on the Spartans when he had the chance. This charge perhaps shows an overall Theban policy to harm Sparta rather than replace it as the pre-eminent Greek power.

Epaminondas went on to detach other Spartan allies by force or, if he could not do that, ravage and plunder their lands and crops. He took Sicyon, which gave him access to a port in the Peloponnese, and Pellene. The Spartans and Athenians once again refused to come out and face Epaminondas in the open field. Epaminondas's second invasion seems much less impressive than the first, but it did further harm Sparta and render it unable to impose its will on other Greek states.

There may have been dissatisfaction in Thebes with Epaminondas' policies concentrating only on the Peloponnese, since he was not re-elected Boeotarch for 368 BCE. Alternatively, this may have been a result of the prosecution by his enemies. Without Theban or Epaminondas' leadership, the Arcadians and Eleians squabbled, eventually declaring war on each other in 365 BCE.

Epaminondas rejoined the Theban army as a regular hoplite for the year of 368 BCE. When the army (which was serving against Alexander of Pherae in Thessaly) was led astray by their Boeotarchs, the men of the phalanx called on Epaminondas to lead them to safety. He stepped out of the line and did so, saving them from defeat, according to Diodorus. This reveals the high regard that he was held in by the rank-and-file, and also his own humility by returning to the ranks when not elected for office. Epaminondas may also have been a member of the Sacred Band and recognised as an elite hoplite in his own right. Pelopidas died in 364 BCE and Epaminondas seems to have taken over as lochagos of the Sacred Band.

In 366 BCE Epaminondas invaded the Peloponnese for a third time. This time he invaded Achaea in the north and sought to deprive Sparta of yet another ally. He also sought to build a fleet to rival Athens in the Aegean. This was a miscalculation.

DEATH AT MANTINEA

In 362 BCE peace was concluded between Elis and Arcadia, but it wasn't long before age-old divides resurfaced between Thebes and Epaminondas, who had been appointed leader of the Boeotian-Peloponnesian alliance. Certain members of the alliance requested that he lead an expedition to the Peloponnese. This was approved, but the Theban government put a caveat on the expedition requiring it to be concluded within four months.

Epaminondas marched, and the opposing forces met him at Mantinea. These included men from Elis, Arcadia, Athens and part of the forces from Sparta. Epaminondas planned a bold night march on an undefended Sparta. The Spartan king Agesilaus II (who had only advanced a short way from Sparta with the rest of the Spartan force) had time to fall back and prepare defences. Epaminondas' men swept into the city – the first force ever to do so – but the city was desperately defended and fighting in the narrow streets favoured the defenders. Epaminondas was forced back. He decided to return north and sent his cavalry ahead to try and seize Mantinea. Both of these gambits were bold and sound but neither worked out in Epaminondas' favour.

Epaminondas marched his infantry north towards Mantinea in battle formation. He encountered the enemy forces drawn up at the narrowest point of the plain and ordered his men to down arms. This gave the impression that he was camping for the night and some of the enemy forces likewise made camp. Sending his cavalry forward to create a dust cloud, Epaminondas ordered his units (lochoi) to mass on the left wing where he was positioned. This formation mirrored that at Leuctra. His force numbered probably 25-30,000 and the opposing forces some 20,000. His dense left flank probably included all of the Boeotian hoplites, some 6-7,000 men. The plan, as at Leuctra, was to break through on the enemy right and then roll up the line, preventing any from escaping to Mantinea.

As before, the rest of the line was drawn up obliquely. Epaminondas advanced, which threw the enemy into a panic when they realised. The Boeotian cavalry saw off the paltry Spartan horse, and their retreat disrupted the Spartan phalanx. Epaminondas' massed phalanx smashed into the Spartan right wing and, just as at Leuctra, they broke and ran. As the pursuit of the Spartans began, Epaminondas himself fell. Upon hearing of his demise, the Boeotian phalanx halted and, although victory was already secure, they sensed that they could do nothing without him.

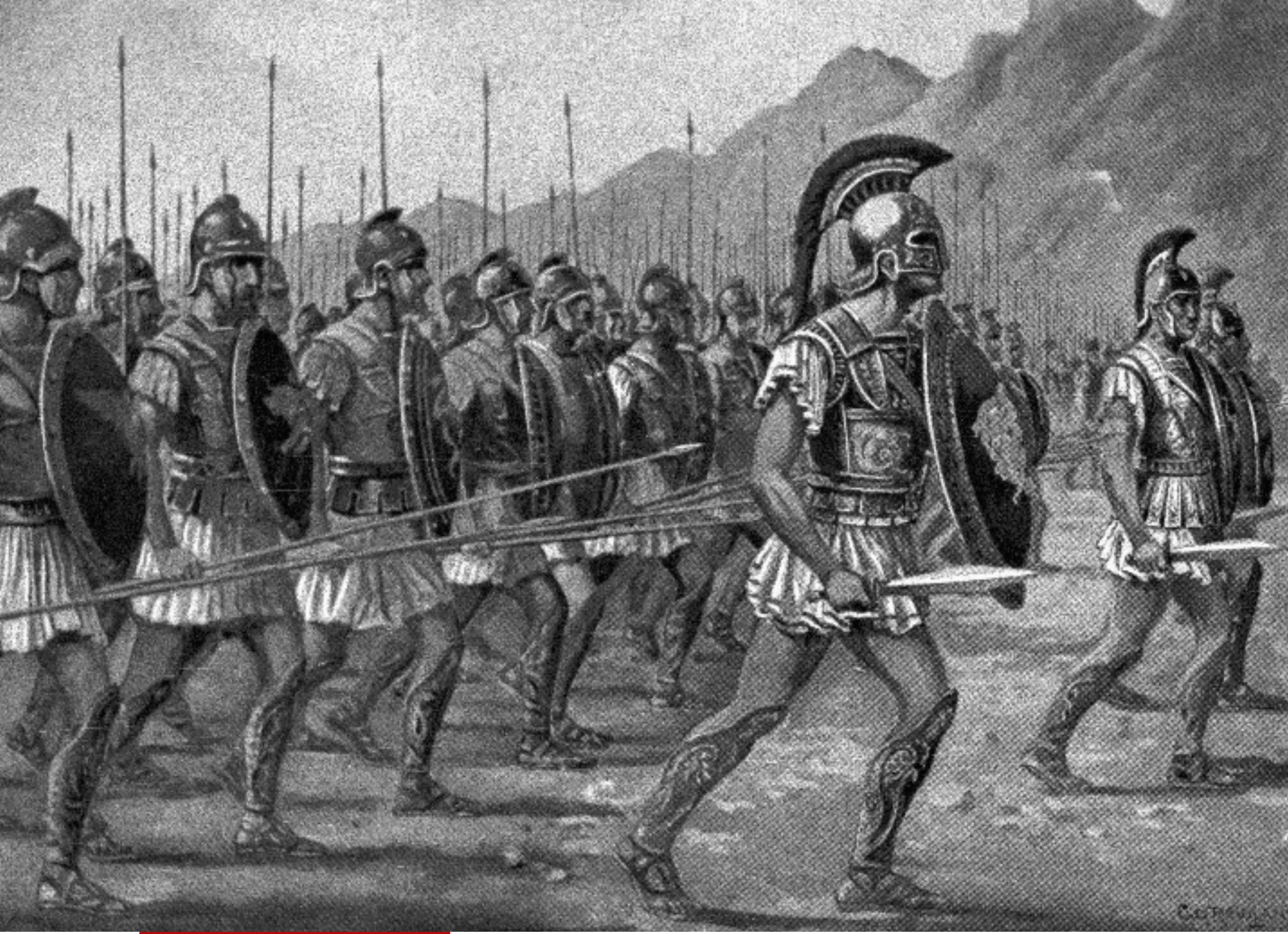
With Epaminondas' death the Theban hegemony of Greece began to fade, although Theban power persisted until it was ruthlessly destroyed by Philip and his brilliant son Alexander in 335 BCE.

Epaminondas' career was one of amazing success, innovation and strategic foresight. His fellow Boeotians knew what they'd had in him, and, with his death, what they had lost.

THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF GREECE

HOW THE WAXING POWER OF ROME ENVELOPED THE WANING STRENGTH OF ITS EASTERN NEIGHBOURS

WORDS BY • **JAMES HORTON**



WHEN THE Spartans made their defiant and greatest stand against the Persians at Thermopylae, Rome was nothing more than a simple settlement straddling the Tiber River. When Philip of Macedon claimed hegemony over the Greek city-states and his son Alexander marched his army to the edge of the known world, Rome had just begun to prove itself as a regional power in central Italy. But by the turn of the 3rd century BCE Sparta had fallen from its near-mythical pedestal and Alexander's empire had fragmented – yet the Romans had kept on conquering.

Over several centuries, the city of Rome had ascended from a monarchy to an oligarchic republic and become sovereign over most of the Italian peninsula. The war-mongering Romans spent the middle of the 3rd century BCE mostly occupied with their first war against Carthage – a rich North African trading city on the southern side of the Mediterranean – over control of the island of Sicily. It was a hard-fought campaign that spanned over two decades, but the grit of the Romans eventually paid off; they claimed not only victory but also their first overseas territory. With most of Italy, the bulk of Sicily and Sardinia now firmly under their control, they were free to turn their attention east for the first time.

Their immediate concern was with Illyria, which sat north of mainland Greece and separated the Macedonians from the Adriatic Sea. The Illyrians had been plaguing Roman trade, and so with their veteran navy they steamed across the water and delivered over 20,000 legionnaires on their enemy's shores. Despite the best preparations from their queen, Teuta, the unorganised and amateur Illyrians were no match for Roman legions, and they were easily dispatched.

The Romans had, at this stage, no desire to remain permanently on the other side of the Adriatic, but their presence would not go unnoticed. The chief antagonist to the Roman appearance in Illyria was King Philip V of Macedon, at this point still a virile young man hoping to expand his empire. So when the Carthaginians came back to fight Rome a second time – this time with an exceptional general named Hannibal in their ranks – Philip jumped at the chance to expand his own territory and kick the battered Romans while he did so.

Hannibal had recently won three crushing victories over the Romans, culminating in the Battle of Cannae, where over 50,000 Roman legionnaires lost their lives. Hearing of this success, Philip eagerly offered to attack the Romans' Illyrian footholds and, if possible, invade Italy and help the African general beat the Romans once and for all.

Unfortunately for Philip, the other Greek states were wary of allowing the ambitious Macedonian too much power, and it didn't take much convincing for them to rise up in armed resistance. The Romans were engaged on multiple fronts, but they still sent ships and a small ground force to Greece to form diplomatic ties with the natives. Their efforts were a considerable success as many states were eager to form a coalition to tackle Philip. During the First Macedonian War the Romans were required to do very little fighting on land themselves, as their allies took to the field to combat the Macedonian threat. This task mainly fell to the Aetolian League, who signed the first formal treaty between Rome and a Greek power, but other states soon signed up, including Athens and Sparta. Philip was not without his own supporters in Greece, however, and nearly every significant power in the region was eventually dragged into the conflict on one side or the other.

Throughout the protracted campaign, cities, towns and fortifications would change hands but neither side would be definitively defeated, and the war would eventually fizzle out to a lacklustre conclusion for both sides. The Aetolians had grown tired of fighting at Rome's behest, Philip had issues with barbarians at his northern border, and Rome wanted to conclude its conflict with Carthage. Peace was duly declared and Philip was left with a lingering hunger to win a subsequent war. He perhaps did not fully appreciate that almost all of Rome's attention had been on Hannibal and Carthage, and what he had faced was but a fraction of its power. He had been granted a stay of execution, but both powers knew future conflict would be inevitable.

The Romans, for their part, hadn't left a great first impression on many Greeks. Throughout this period of war the Romans were careful to declare themselves as friends and liberators of Greece, there to save the proud city-states from an oppressive Macedonian king. What ground troops they did deploy though were especially savage. The Greeks thought of them as a barbaric people, and they affirmed this by their treatment of certain Greek cities, such as Oreus and Dyme. Valuable metals, paintings and sculptures were all seized by the marauding legions. But the greatest commodity to capture was people - the Romans sold many inhabitants of Dyme into slavery and made a mint in the process. We can't attribute all of their abhorrent behaviour to the pursuit of profit, however, as Roman soldiers were not above raping, pillaging and burning settlements to the ground as their blood ran hot after battle.

Despite the Greeks' disgusted reaction to the Roman way, they themselves had engaged in similar practices in their recent history. Nevertheless, Roman behaviour left a sour taste in the mouth of the Greeks. What sort of liberators, and self-proclaimed protectors of Greek liberty, would sack their own protectorates? The hypocrisy was clear.

Philip did not pause for long before re-initiating aggressive action. He turned his attention to the Greek islands and began to storm and capture them with impunity. But perhaps more worryingly for Rome was his covert pact with Antiochus, king of the Seleucid Empire based in Syria, which saw them agree to attack Egypt's holdings in the Aegean and Asia Minor. The Romans were increasingly concerned about Philip's relationship with another superpower and opted to stop him before he grew too powerful.

For this task they sent one of the newly elected consuls - the highest-ranking

The ruins of the Temple of Apollo in Corinth, Greece

THE ACHAEAN LEAGUE

The second Achaean League was established in 280 BCE in the Peloponnese of southern Greece. It opted for a seldom-used approach for the ancient city-states - they would work together to become something greater than the sum of their parts. It would be a strategy that proved very effective, as over their first 50 years the confederation successfully absorbed several additional regions into its blossoming family. For most of its existence the League was actively trying to become the undisputed power of the Peloponnese. It already held Corinth, but its staunch opponent Sparta represented a rather tantalising prize.

During the First Macedonian War between Philip V and Rome, the Spartans would side with the Romans and the Achaeans with Philip. After Rome's success during the second war, however, the Achaeans would switch sides and soon be rewarded with a rebellious Sparta as a prize. The federation remained loyal to Rome for decades, but the Romans were eternally looking for potential threats within their Greek neighbours. Unfortunately for the Achaeans, united Greek states that were tied to each other rather than directly to Rome were chief among them.

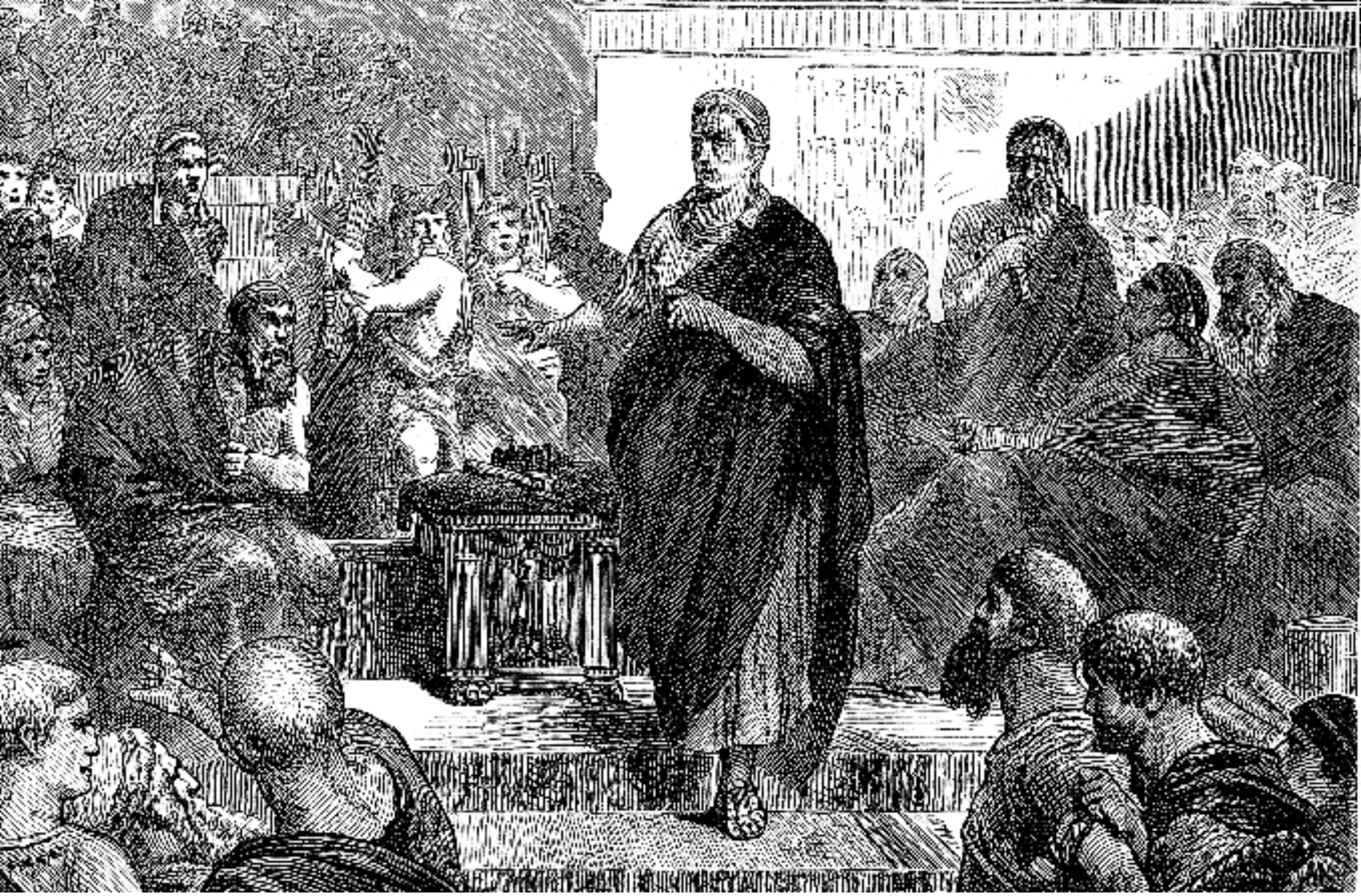
This led the Romans to declare that states wishing to withdraw from the League would face no repercussions, driving the remaining Achaeans into open rebellion. Their efforts came far too late and were ultimately futile in the face of an already dominant Rome, who by this stage had already vanquished Perseus. The Romans arrived and easily ruptured the League, bringing its existence to an end following the fateful sacking of Corinth in 146 BCE.

Roman magistrate – named Titus Quinctius Flamininus, who arrived in Greece in 198 BCE at not yet 30 years old. Demands by Flamininus to Philip fell on deaf ears, and soon the two generals and their allies met on the field. Flamininus' forces managed to get the upper hand during the Battle of Aous Narrows, but the restricted pass allowed Philip to escape with most of his force. This defeat did prove a catalyst for the Achaean League to break rank with Philip, however, which was a serious coup for Flamininus. In a bid to win a new ally, Philip offered the captured Greek town of Argos to the ruler of Sparta, Nabis. Nabis accepted the gift but he immediately went over to the Roman side anyway, temporarily forgetting his previous animosity and rivalry with the Achaeans.

The Romans were winning the diplomatic game, and as the campaigning season of the next year opened, they strengthened their hand even more by winning over the Boeotian League, albeit mostly through thinly veiled intimidation. A decisive encounter was looming and would arrive after the winter, when the two sides clashed at Cynoscephalae.

Flamininus had been hounding Philip's force as it searched for a well-provisioned position, and under heavy rain and dense fog the two forces camped either side of a ridge named the 'dog-heads', or Cynoscephalae. Both generals sent their cavalry towards the ridge under low visibility and the two sides were startled to find their enemy right in front of them. Skirmishing between the cavalry began, and as more forces rushed in to help, things soon escalated into a full pitched battle.

It was the advantages enjoyed by the Roman maniple system – which arranged soldiers in neat, semi-independent units of around 300 men – that proved pivotal in the fight at Cynoscephalae. Philip's phalanxes, which



“THE ROMANS WOULD ENGAGE ANTIOCHUS AT THERMOPYLAE, THE VERY SITE WHERE SPARTA HAD CEMENTED ITS ETERNAL LEGEND”

were composed of dense clusters of pike men, initially enjoyed success on their slightly elevated position and drove the Romans back down the hill. Flamininus attempted to force his legions through on his left flank but was stopped in his tracks, and in some places his line began to collapse. Fortunately, the triarii – who were spear-wielding veteran legionnaries typically held in reserve – were ready and waiting to plug the gap, offering a defensive position for others to rally behind.

One of Flamininus' officers then exploited his army's flexibility by peeling off a contingent of maniples from the right flank, who were fighting higher up the hill, and leading them behind the Macedonian line. He sent his soldiers crashing down into the enemy rear, and the fighting soon devolved into rout. The Romans mercilessly pursued, hacking down around 8,000 of Philip's soldiers and capturing another 5,000 as prisoners. It was nothing short of a decisive victory for Rome.

The terms of surrender were harsh for Philip, as Macedon was crippled through confiscated territory. However, the Greek sides who fought for Rome did not fare as well as they thought they would after his defeat, as Flamininus denied them new territory. In their desperation to throw off the yolk of Macedon they had invited in the Romans, but, ironically, they were merely swapping one overlord for another.

The prospect of Roman hegemony wasn't lost on the Aetolians, who bemoaned their lack of awarded territory by Flamininus. But what the Romans sought was a balance of power in Greece – they wanted no one to threaten their informal control of the region, regardless of whether they were friend or foe. In a sly move, Flamininus pronounced the Greeks as free and announced the withdrawal of all Roman troops. The locals rejoiced, but the physical removal of an army did not release the Greeks from Roman shackles. The Romans put in place loyal rulers wherever they could, and, if needed, they could simply send their forces back. Rome was the new master of Greece, and none truly believed anything different.

There was one task Flamininus was keen on settling before the Romans departed en masse, and that was war on Sparta. The ancient city's gift from Philip, Argos, had been part of the Achaean League before the Second Macedonian War had begun, and the League wanted it back. Sparta's ruler, Nabis, refused, and so Flamininus and his allies amassed a massive force numbering up to 50,000 men and marched on the city.

The allied forces swiftly recovered Argos, but after Nabis declined an offer of peace they continued their march. The two sides clashed outside the city's boundaries and the Spartans were overwhelmed. Retreating within the city walls, Nabis had accumulated provisions to endure a siege and held out hope of survival. Flamininus was in no mood to wait, however, and ordered his numerous forces to storm the city. The narrow passageways of the city streets worked to impede the invaders' progress, and the Spartans successfully used burning debris to repel their enemies. The soldiers were

Titus Quinctius Flamininus, the Roman who was instrumental in the conquest of Greece

A coin depicting Alexander the Great with the horn of the Egyptian god Amun

recalled and redeployed the following day. The Spartans again managed to endure, but by the third day they were so battered Nabis had little choice but to surrender.

Flamininus decided to leave Nabis in charge of Sparta under harsh terms, much to the Achaean League's chagrin. They had dreamed for years of assimilating the city, and following the Roman's departure from Greek shores wasted little time in realising this goal. It was Nabis himself who struck the match, though. Antiochus, the leader of the Seleucids of Asia Minor and Syria, had recently been beckoned by the Aetolians to "liberate Greece" from the Romans. The Spartans leapt at the opportunity to throw off the Roman yolk and began to immediately attack the port of Gytheum held by the Achaean League. An Achaean general, Philopoemen, did not wait for the Romans to offer a response.

His naval counter-attack against the Spartans got off to a poor start, as embarrassingly his flagship fell apart at sea, but his luck turned as Nabis was assassinated by the Aetolians. Philopoemen marched on Sparta and captured it, fulfilling a long-held Achaean ambition. Sparta would stir and lash out at its new overlords over the next few turbulent years, but these would prove to be its death throes. Philopoemen was at first successful in peacefully re-incorporating Sparta into the League, but the city's second revolt was put down with more force. Not only were many Spartans butchered, but their storied constitution was torn to pieces and a new one written in its place, essentially bringing to a close the city-state's existence as a cultural warrior territory.

The Romans would engage Antiochus at Thermopylae, the very site where Sparta had cemented its eternal legend, only a handful of years later. Despite the ending to that epic encounter being common knowledge to almost every Greek, Antiochus did not sufficiently prepare for the Romans employing the Persian trick of surrounding his forces via the alternate route around the pass. Like Leonidas before him, Antiochus was surrounded, and his forces were brutally crushed between the Roman pincer.

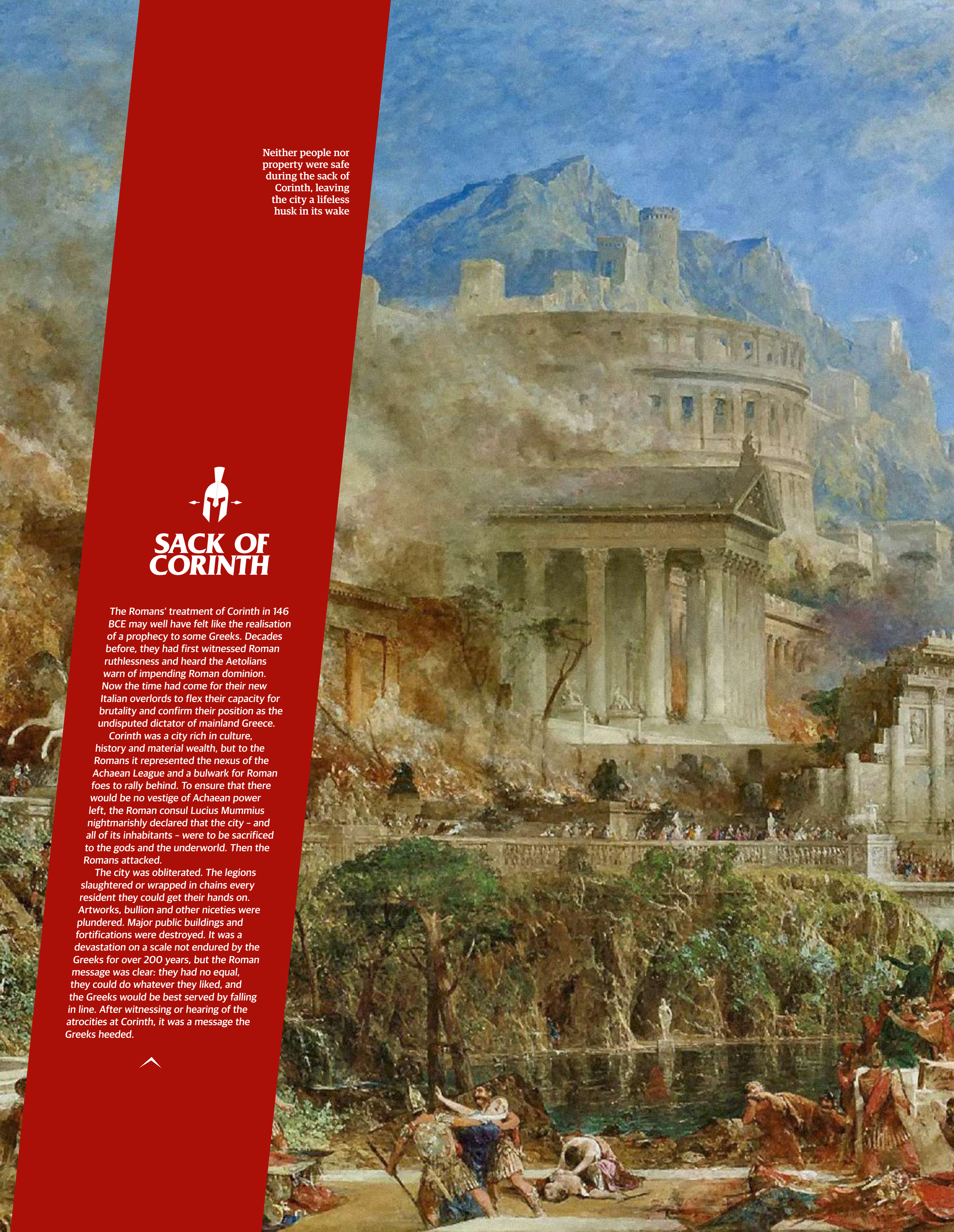
There were now no superpowers left to fight Rome on the entire Mediterranean. To make matters worse for any freedom-loving Greeks, the subsequent defeat of Antiochus in Asia Minor provided the Romans with an embarrassment of riches. Rome's treasury - and her leading men - found their coffers flooded. The Romans now had uncompromising power, authority and wealth. With this new-found

PHILIP V

The kingdom of Macedonia is one of the most important states in European history. Under Philip I, it became the chief power-broker in Greece and re-invented the traditional Greek phalanx into a devastating war machine. Alexander, Philip's eldest son, would use this war machine to become the greatest conqueror the world had ever seen. The successor kings of Macedon following Alexander's death were never able to match his meteoric heights, but some possessed formidable military talents in the vain of their esteemed ancestor.

Philip V came to power in 221 BCE, when he was still a teenager, and swiftly revealed his ability in combat through successful campaigns against the Spartans, Aetolians and Elisians. He would prove to be Rome's greatest opponent in Greece and was its equal on many occasions during the first prolonged conflict, which spanned ten years. Despite his obvious talent, he failed to garner enough support to resist Rome's expansion and would eventually be cowed and forced to support them in their conquest of the Greek mainland.

Philip's life would end in heartbreak. His youngest son Demetrius had been a hostage at Rome and made many influential friends while there, alarming his brother Perseus, who saw him as a future puppet of the Italian state. Perseus conspired to have Demetrius murdered for treason on account of his suspicions, and Philip never quite recovered from the subsequent murder of his son. He died in 179 BCE, just shy of 60 years old while on campaign against the Dardanians, playing the part of warrior until his final breath.



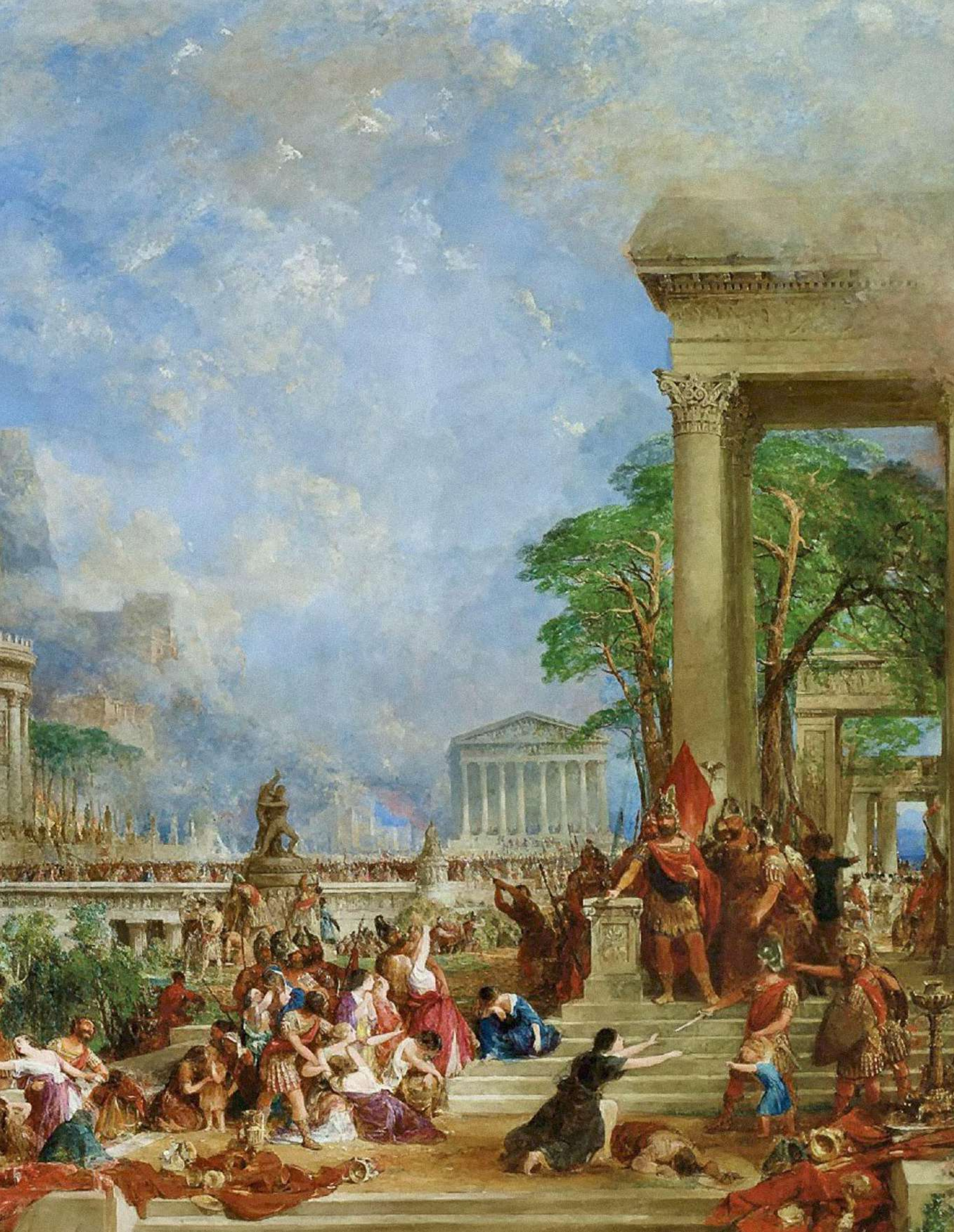
Neither people nor property were safe during the sack of Corinth, leaving the city a lifeless husk in its wake

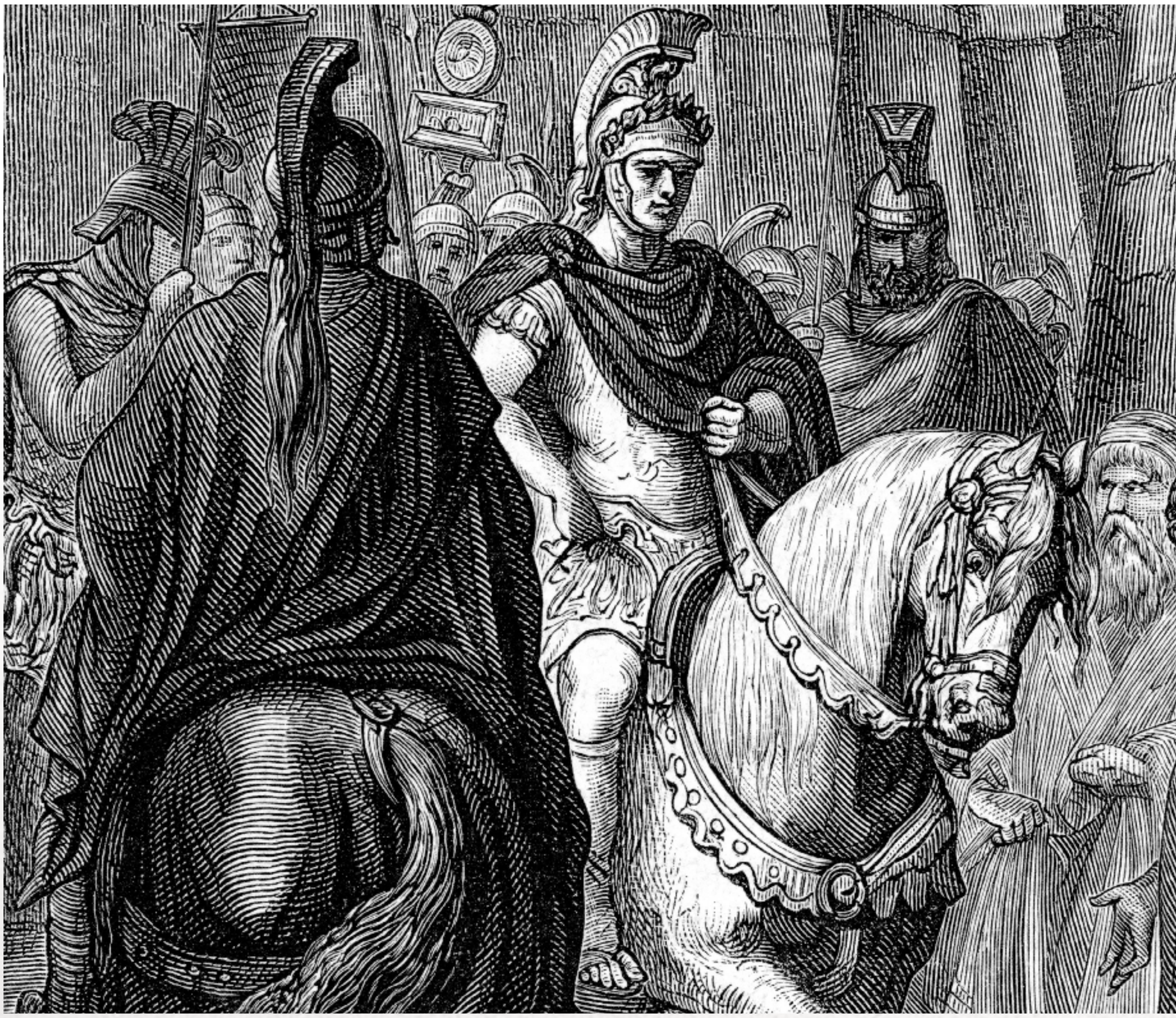
SACK OF CORINTH

The Romans' treatment of Corinth in 146 BCE may well have felt like the realisation of a prophecy to some Greeks. Decades before, they had first witnessed Roman ruthlessness and heard the Aetolians warn of impending Roman dominion. Now the time had come for their new Italian overlords to flex their capacity for brutality and confirm their position as the undisputed dictator of mainland Greece.

Corinth was a city rich in culture, history and material wealth, but to the Romans it represented the nexus of the Achaean League and a bulwark for Roman foes to rally behind. To ensure that there would be no vestige of Achaean power left, the Roman consul Lucius Mummius nightmarishly declared that the city – and all of its inhabitants – were to be sacrificed to the gods and the underworld. Then the Romans attacked.

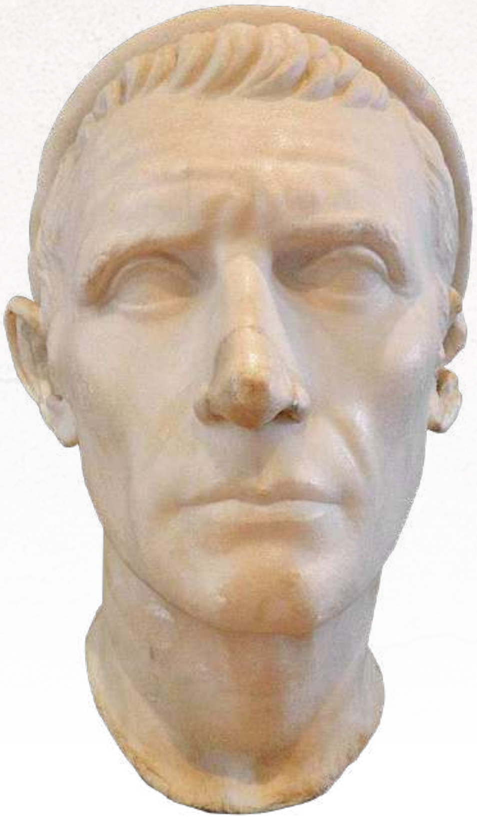
The city was obliterated. The legions slaughtered or wrapped in chains every resident they could get their hands on. Artworks, bullion and other niceties were plundered. Major public buildings and fortifications were destroyed. It was a devastation on a scale not endured by the Greeks for over 200 years, but the Roman message was clear: they had no equal, they could do whatever they liked, and the Greeks would be best served by falling in line. After witnessing or hearing of the atrocities at Corinth, it was a message the Greeks heeded.



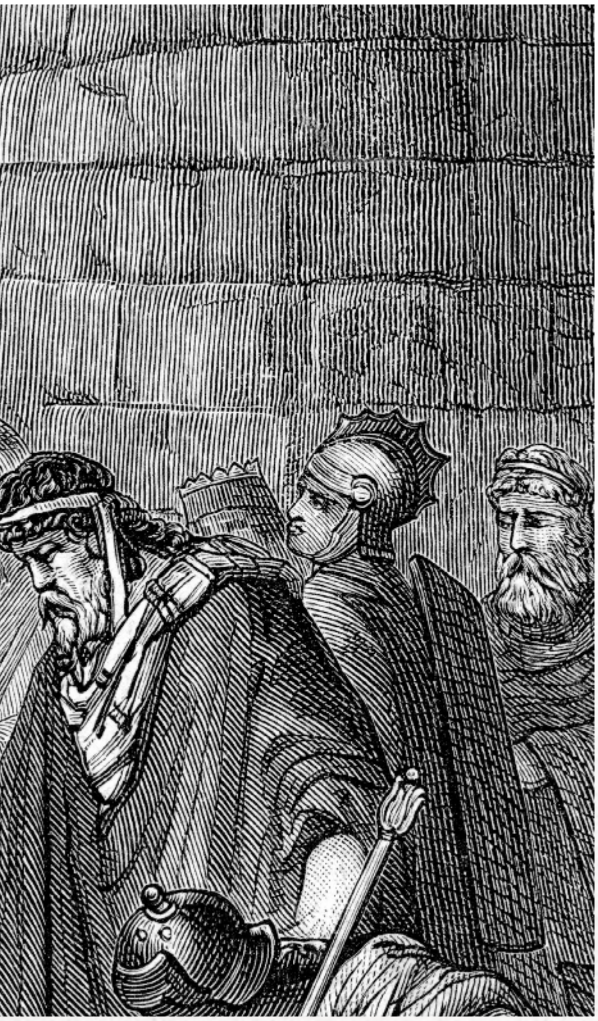


Rozafa Castle was an Illyrian stronghold until it was captured by the Romans in 167 BCE

Dejected Greeks bow to their new Roman overlords, but life in Greece under Roman rule meant little in the way of change



This bust is possibly a Roman copy of a Hellenistic portrait of Antoichus III, leader of the Seleucid Empire



confidence in their own resources and ability, the Romans began to cast aside the façade of helpful protector of Greek liberty and assume the role of authoritarian more openly.

It would fall to Macedon to defiantly resist Roman might one last time, but it was no longer Philip at the helm, rather his eldest son Perseus. Perseus invested heavily in strengthening his position but was careful not to break any terms of his treaty with Rome. But this concession was not enough for the Romans - they couldn't stand idly by while a rival king gathered power in their new dominion and stirred the patriotic hearts of the Greeks. They soon declared war on Perseus and sent 50,000 soldiers to Greece.

The young Macedonian king got the better of his opponents during their first two campaigning seasons there, and the rebellious towns viciously enslaved by the Romans only helped to elevate Perseus to the position of saviour and encourage some to defect to his cause. However, the young king still craved a pitched battle that would bring about definitive victory - at least in the short term. He would get his wish at Pydna, where the two armies would clash and the war would be settled. Perseus' phalanxes opened strongly; the Romans had not yet fully formed their lines and he sent his men charging into them, inflicting heavy casualties. However, this had the consequence of breaking the phalanxes' tight formation, and the Romans swiftly capitalised on this error by sending units in between the exposed cracks in the enemy line. The legionnaries then proceeded to erode Perseus' forces from the inside out, collapsing his phalanx and inflicting terrible casualties.

After the fall of Perseus, the Romans acted to hamstring Macedonian power by dividing the territory into four republics. This worked for a time, but three pretenders to the throne over the following few years encouraged the Romans to permanently garrison Macedon and eventually settle it as an official province of the empire. And so the burning flame of Macedon had finally been extinguished, and with it the last glimmer of hope for a Rome-free Greece for the next 500 years.

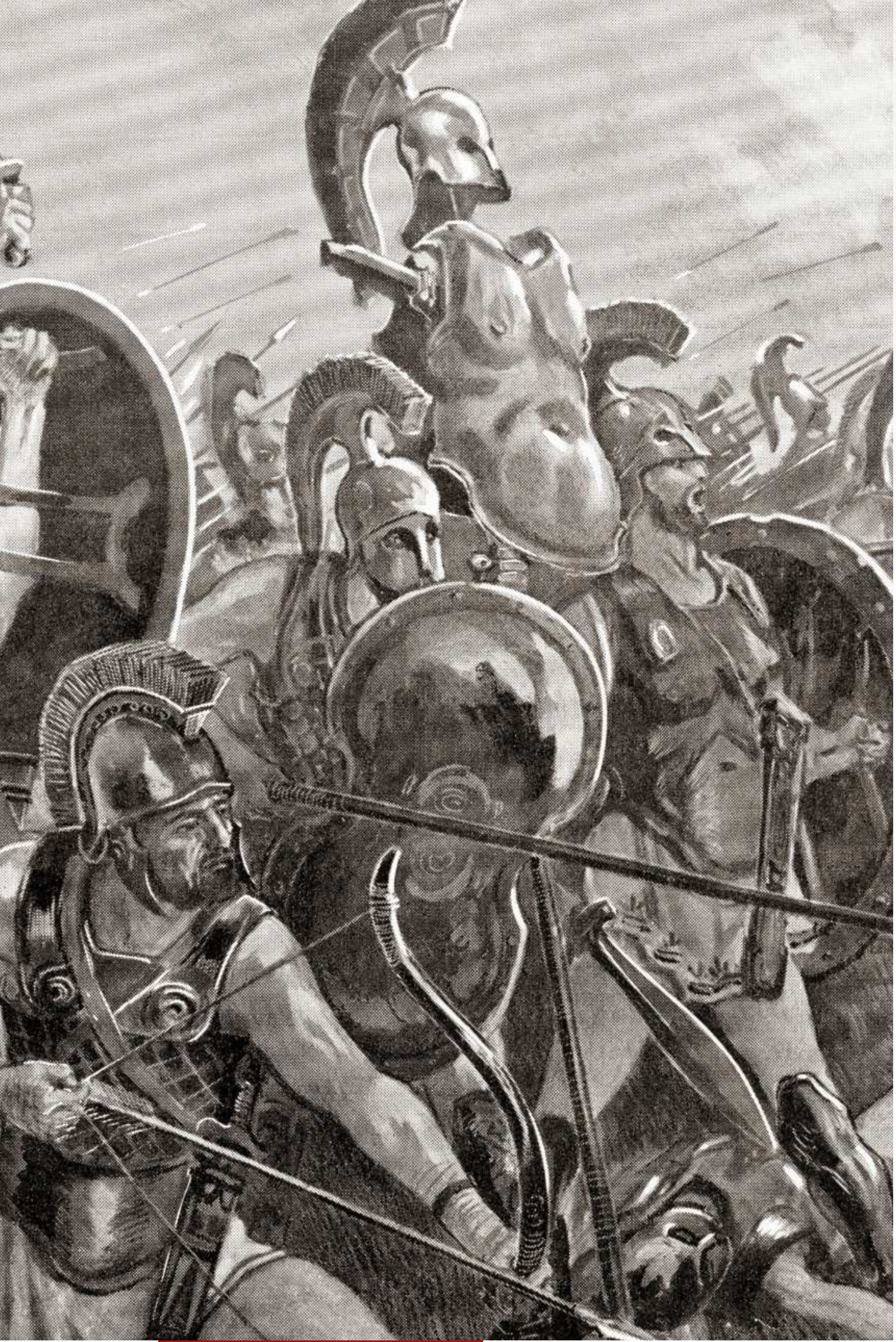
The conquest of Greece brought about a new age of Rome. The Greeks may have looked rather dimly upon the Italian 'barbarians', but many Roman senators looked upon Greece's culture with admiration. Multitudes of captured paintings, sculptures and educated slaves were purchased by Rome's leading men, and with the newfound wealth of international empire came the flamboyant age of Rome, complete with Hellenistic splendour. Some conservative Romans would fight in vain for traditional Roman virtue to remain centre stage, but yet more found themselves enamoured with Greek art, literature, philosophy and lifestyle.

This reverence for the Greeks would continue into the Roman Principate and beyond, as Emperor Hadrian would remain a devout lover of all things Hellenistic. The Greeks may have lost their liberty under the Romans, but their legend and influence would continue to inspire many for millennia.

SPARTA'S LEGACY

ANCIENT SPARTA MAY BE GONE, BUT ITS MEMORY LIVES ON. WE LOOK AT THE WAYS IN WHICH IT LEFT ITS MARK ON THE WORLD…

WORDS BY • **STEVE WRIGHT**



THINK OF Sparta, and it is likely that what most often comes to mind is an image of fanatically committed soldiers devoted to military service in aid of their city-state. While it is undeniable that the Spartans earned their fearsome reputation many times over, it doesn't provide the full story of just how much of an influence their ways and beliefs would have on future civilisations. Unlike much of ancient Greece, little survives of the Spartans by way of physical structures; rather, it is their attitudes and beliefs that continue to hold at least some sway in certain quarters.

Perhaps most topically, an example of their relative progressiveness can be seen in the role women played in Spartan society. Indeed, parts of Greek society viewed Spartan men as being overly submissive to their male counterparts; one legend notes a Greek woman asking Queen Gorgo of Sparta, “Why is it that only Spartan women can rule men?”, to which she replied, “Because we are the only women who give birth to men.” True or not, these words say a lot: Sparta was a warrior state, and to create warriors, their mothers needed to be cut from the same cloth.

While women in many other cultures saw their prospects being far more limited, Spartan women benefited from a more enlightened outlook. While boys went off separately to learn to fight, girls enjoyed a structured education system, taking in a variety of academic subjects, in addition to other leisure activities like music, dancing and poetry. Dancing especially had a high level of significance placed on it, being ascribed as a method of worshipping the gods, which girls often participated in. Additionally, the importance of physical activity was emphasised just as much for them as for their male counterparts – after all, healthy children were the product of healthy parents.

When they were older, their role in society didn't diminish. While they still married at an age that would seem young by today's standards (about 18), it was older than what was considered normal throughout the rest of Greece (about 14). Moreover, since men were not permitted to live with their families, instead residing in barracks with their fellow soldiers until the age of 45, this presented many more opportunities for women. Due to their long combat-induced absences, women were left to maintain their estates, with Aristotle noting, “two fifths of the whole country... was in the hands of women...” Moreover, daughters in Spartan society were even entitled to a portion of the family estate, while in the rest of Greece women weren't allowed to own any land whatsoever.

The importance of women's role in Spartan society goes hand in hand with the city-state's military prowess. Its outlook was geared towards being prepared, a mantra that was carried through right from their early training regimes all the way to their time as seasoned warriors. Today, military organisations like the Gurkhas and SAS stand as examples of total commitment towards a single goal, and much of this dedication can be traced back to the single-minded approach of the Spartans.

Right from birth, Spartan boys' destinies were decided – there was nothing else they were allowed to be, other than soldiers. At the age of seven, they were taken from their

homes, living communally with boys their own age and made to undertake regular physically activities and competitions. Food was scarce, forcing them to hunt for it, and in some cases steal if they were to survive - they were punished if they were caught.

At the age of 20 they became full-time soldiers, and served until the age of 60 - if they lived that long. While the fruits of their years of training left them fearsome-looking physical specimens, they were no mere brutes. Much importance was placed on the implementation of tactics, such as the phalanx, during which the soldiers moved in close together, interlocking their shields in a deep formation. Massed together, they were able to hold off and push enemies back with maximum effectiveness.

Although a force in battle for centuries, inevitably the ravages of time had an impact. Sparta was weakened during the Corinthian War of 395-387 BCE, both by a rare defeat at the Battle of Leuctra and by the untimely revolt of the helots. While they prevailed at the time, around 4,000 soldiers had died - a disastrous loss, as Spartan society relied heavily on producing soldiers through hereditary bloodlines, and there was simply no way to recover so many man.

Even as Sparta declined in influence, however, memories of its grandeur remained; there are reports of a Spartan phalanx in action as late as 378 CE, and Alexander the Great famously decided not to invade. While Sparta was a shadow of its former glory, he evidently considered it still too dangerous.

The ability of Sparta to function as an effective military state can in part be attributed to the efficiency of its government. While we won't go into detail about the make-up of its ruling structure, having already done so earlier in this book, it is useful to relate its inner workings to what exists today in order to highlight just how ahead of its time it was.

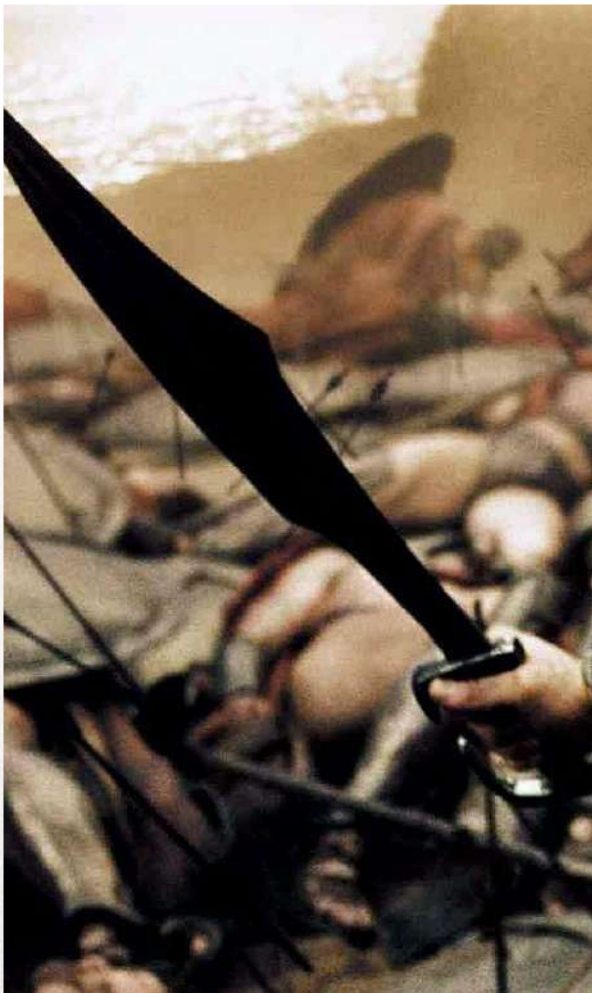
Much like today, there were limits and checks in place to limit the amount of power one - or even a few - individuals could have. Although the two ruling kings were dominant, they were balanced out by the five ephors, who shared their powers. In turn, the ephors could be voted in and out by the national assembly, with elections held every year. Over time, political structures changed, with the ephors being briefly abolished in 227 BCE before being reinstated five years later.

Further down the political chain, other members of Spartan society had their say. The gerousia was made up of men over the age of 60 - retired soldiers who served for life. In term, they were elected by the voice vote of other civilians gathered together separately. There wasn't complete and total representation - the helots remained persecuted and subjugated - but it was still a larger pool of people with a say than what existed throughout much of the rest of the world at the time.

Beyond the unique nature of their societal structures, Sparta has continued to live on in popular culture. Indeed, the modern-day use of the word 'spartan' itself is indicative of the regard they are held in, with the Oxford Dictionary describing its meaning as "showing

Today, what little is left of ancient Sparta comprises mainly ruins

The Spartans' famous last stand at the Battle of Thermopylae, as depicted in the 2006 blockbuster *300*



or characterised by austerity or a lack of comfort or luxury". In short, they were a race defined by their toughness and indifference to all forms of creature comforts.

In military terms, the ancient Spartan hoplites remain an evocative image and have provided fertile storytelling possibilities for many writers and filmmakers. One of the principle subjects of this has commonly been the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE, with accounts highlighting King Leonidas' heroic last stand with 300 of his fellow Spartans against the million-strong Persian forces of god-king Xerxes I.

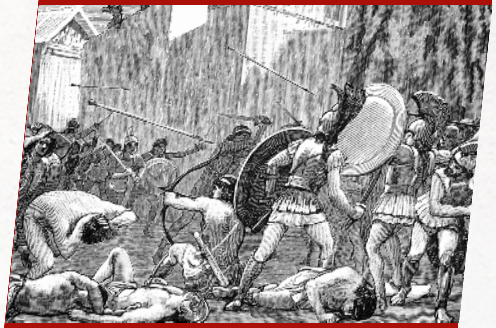
While time has led to exaggeration (Persian forces likely numbered around 100,000-150,000 and Leonidas had the assistance of around 700 Thespians during the famous last stand), the likes of Rudolph Maté's *The 300 Spartans* (1962) and Zack Snyder's *300* (2007, based on a fictionalised account from Frank Miller's graphic novel) have helped to cement the Spartans' place in history as fearsome warriors who never backed down.

The 2014 sequel, *300: Rise of an Empire*, gave a similar treatment to the crucial battles at Artemisium and Salamis that ultimately saw the Greeks frustrate the second Persian invasion of Greece, and 2004's *Troy* sees Spartan king Menelaus play a prominent role in the classic tragedy.

With the Battle of Thermopylae's tale of overwhelming bravery in the face of daunting odds, it is therefore unsurprising that many sports teams have appropriated the name for their own use. Various college American football teams are in existence, such as the Michigan State Spartans, San Jose State Spartans, Tampa Spartans, USC Upstate Spartans and Norfolk State Spartans, and there are even more across other sports: Blyth Spartans and AC Sparta Prague (football), Manchester Village Spartans (rugby), Southern Oregon Spartans (hockey) and the Spartan Cricket Club of Barbados.

Like most civilisations, what we recognise as ancient Sparta eventually declined and crumbled away. After being defeated in the Laconian War of 195 BCE by a coalition of Rome and various Greek city-states, Sparta was brought under the control of the Roman Empire, with Nabis ruling as its final king. In 396 CE it was sacked by the Visigoths, and by the Middle Ages its political and cultural centre had migrated to the nearby Mystras.

Today, the modern city of Sparta (or Sparti, as it is also known) exists on the site of ancient Sparta, having been reestablished in 1834. Aside from assorted ruins, there is little left of what was once a proud and mighty city-state, but its legacy lives on nonetheless, and it will continue to do so for generations to come.



SPARTA: SAVAGE OR SOPHISTICATED?

Thanks to popular culture, we have a very particular image of ancient Spartans: strong and powerful, living to wage war and showing enjoyment in doing so. But is it fair? In a way, yes. As we've mentioned in this article, Sparta's entire society was geared towards raising soldiers, and this attitude permeated everywhere. They were certainly brutal in doing so – infants considered sickly were left to die, and the ruthless killings of the helot population were considered necessary to maintaining law and order. While their military prowess may have been exaggerated in retellings of events like the Battle of Thermopylae, it is no embellishment to claim that they were fearsome warriors. However, this does overshadow just how progressive they were in other sections of society, such as their treatment of women and ruling structures. These weren't necessarily a product of their enlightened personalities – the women's relatively high status was considered a practical necessity rather than a matter of benevolence, and citizens still essentially had to earn the right to participate in their democracy rather than enjoy its fruits from birth – but it still paints Sparta in a better light than other city-states, and one that it doesn't always get credit for.

21ST-CENTURY SPARTA

EXPLORE THE SLEEPY GREEK TOWN THAT MIGHTY LEONIDAS ONCE CALLED HOME

WORDS BY ◆ **ALICE BARNES-BROWN**

DRIVING ALONG the main route into modern Sparta, with the grey mountains rising on one side and the fragrant olive groves on the other, you'd never know this nondescript Greek town was once the centre of a feared civilisation.

Just as warriors and diplomats did thousands of years before, you'll traverse a bridge across the Evrotas River, the lifeblood of the Peloponnese region. On its left bank sits the town of Sparta (or Sparti as it is known to the locals). Since the decline of Classical Greece, the town has lost much of its significance. In fact, it's even been invaded a number of times - by the Romans, the Ottomans and the Venetians. After Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830, the fledgling nation was looking to establish its identity, and for this it looked to the glory days of Classical Greece.

Sparta suddenly found itself at the centre of a grand government project. In 1834, King Otto declared that the small town bearing the name 'Sparta' was to become a city called 'Nea Sparti', designed to accommodate 100,000 inhabitants. A number of fine public buildings and private houses were built in the neoclassical style, blending Greece's ambitious vision for its future with its ancient past. If you take a stroll around Sparti's centre, you'll see many of these buildings still in use today, adorned by the blue and white stripes of the Greek flag.

Most of the hotels, shops, restaurants and tourist facilities in Sparti are to be found in the town centre, near the crossroads of Leoforos Likourgou and Konstantinos Palaiologou Street. If you arrive in the town by bus, the station is at one end of Likorgou. From here, you can catch coaches to Athens, Kalamata, Patras, Monemvasia and other fantastic destinations on the Greek mainland.

Like most Greek towns, Sparta is a little rough around the edges, but it has plenty of charm. Among the neoclassical public buildings and 20th-century apartment blocks, citrus trees spring up through the pavements. Don't be tempted to eat their produce, though - they're incredibly bitter, and the Greeks only use their peel to make curd after boiling them numerous times and adding heaps of sugar.

On a sunny day, the present-day citizens of Sparta will go about their working lives just like anywhere else in the world. Come lunchtime, don't be surprised if you see businessmen in suits drinking an iced coffee (frappe, as the locals call it) while sitting in a cafe making phonecalls. Meanwhile, the town squares - or plateia, since we're improving your Greek - are popular hangouts for teens and young people, especially in the early evenings. Be prepared to hear them chattering loudly, skateboarding or playing the latest pop hits on their phones.

The Taygetos Mountains loom above the modern-day city of Sparta

“ONCE YOU’VE EATEN YOUR WEIGHT IN HEARTY GREEK FOOD YOU’LL BE READY TO DO SOME EXPLORING”

If you’re looking for a more traditional vibe, head to one of the town’s tavernas, or more upscale ‘estiatorios’. You’ll be able to recognise them instantly, as the smell of thyme, olive oil and grilled meat will entice you in. Take a seat and enjoy the atmosphere, especially if there’s a live laïkó music night going on. Be sure to order a side of Kalamata olives - they might be world famous, but here they’re simply local produce.

Once you’ve eaten your weight in hearty Greek food and slept in a friendly B&B with the sound of cicadas serenading you to sleep, you’ll be ready to do some exploring. If ancient Sparta is calling your name, the first place you’ll want to visit are what remains of the formerly formidable city. The ruins are a bit scattered around town, but the main set of relics lies on the hills just north of the centre.

They may not be as majestic as other archaeological sites in the region (such as Epidavros or Olympia), but nonetheless they are still very interesting. There’s an ancient acropolis, including a temple and a well-preserved amphitheatre, lying among the olive trees. These ruins were first excavated in 1910 by the British School of Archaeology, but only partially - they weren’t completely dug out until the 1990s. Walk up the dry, rocky path to explore what remains of the ancient city-state.

The oldest construction at the site is the Sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos, which dates from the 6th century BCE. Unusually for the time, the interior of the temple was adorned with expensive copper sheets, which gave it its name - ‘Chalkioikos’ is derived from the Greek word for copper. Inside the temple stood a magnificent statue of the goddess Athena, built by a Spartan craftsman. It bore the inscription ‘Athena, Guardian of the City’. Some relics from the temple can be seen in the Archaeological Museum of Sparta, which isn’t too far away.

The Sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos features in a dramatic story told by Thucydides. King Pausanias, on the run from angry Spartans who accused him of conspiring with Persia, made a break for the sanctuary. He barricaded himself in, so the citizens decided to starve him out. When he was on the brink of death, they carried him outside the temple, where he died. After all, to have him die within the sanctuary would pollute its sacredness.

Just below the Sanctuary is the amphitheatre, which is a Roman construction. This was mostly used for public gatherings and celebrations and had a wooden stage on wheels. This is a bizarrely modern innovation for its time - a wheeled stage would take up less space and could possibly be used to adapt the area to suit the needs of different types of events put on there.

The Evrotas River cuts a valley at the foot of Mount Taygetos and was once an artery for the ancient Spartans

Adjacent to the amphitheatre is the rubble of a few shops and stalls, which opportunist merchants used to sell their products to folks enjoying their time at the amphitheatre. Once again, these are Roman in origin and were made of bricks, mortar and plaster.

Just a few hundred metres away from the ancient Acropolis is the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, a ruin with a dark history. It was one of the most important religious sites in the entire region, originally home to a cult dedicated to worshipping Orthia, a pre-Olympian goddess. Depending on who you believe, it's said that young men were ritually whipped here, and their blood made a grisly offering to the insatiable goddess.

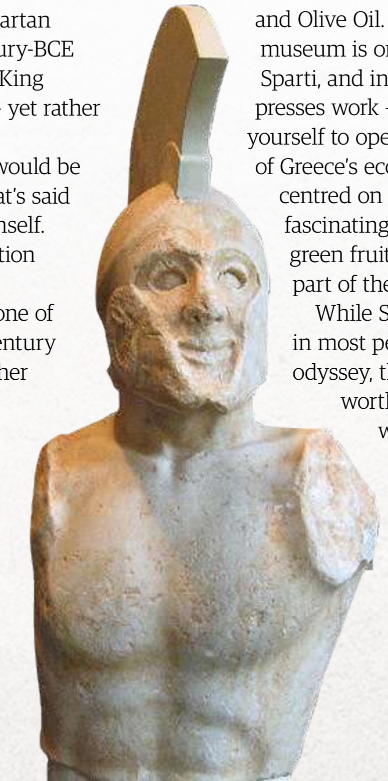
After you've seen what's left of these ancient constructions, you'll be itching to see what was inside them. That's where Sparta's Archaeological Museum comes in. Head back into town and buy your ticket for the bargain price of €2. There are seven halls inside this lovely neoclassical building. Each contains treasures from across the Laconia region, dating back from the Neolithic all the way up to the Roman periods. Some of the highlights include fragmented - but still grand - Roman mosaic floors once found in Spartan houses. There's also a 5th-century-BCE bust of a man purported to be King Leonidas, wearing a stunning - yet rather intimidating - helmet.

Naturally, no visit to Sparta would be complete without a visit to what's said to be the tomb of Leonidas himself. This mysterious, grey construction was unearthed in the late 19th century, but an inscription on one of the blocks dates it to the 5th century BCE. The 2nd-century geographer Pausanias writes that Leonidas was interred here after his death at the Battle of Thermopylae. While its two connected chambers would suggest that this construction was actually a thriving temple to Apollo, the locals insist that the site is the final resting place of their proud warrior king. If you still require a Leonidas fix, you can also admire the impressive statue of him that stands tall and proud next to the ancient Acropolis.

Between the time of Leonidas and the present day, Sparti was largely abandoned. Instead, its Byzantine residents moved uphill to the settlement of Mystras, just a few kilometres away. Thanks to a flourishing economy and ideal climate, the town was hugely prosperous and became the headquarters for the province. Clinging to the edge of the hill, you can explore plenty of sun-baked churches, historic houses, ornate monasteries and even grand palaces showcasing the very finest of Byzantine architecture.

After getting your teeth into so much history, you might be hungry for something different. Luckily, you can enjoy another wonderful thing the Sparta region is famous for - olive oil. Greek olive oil is known worldwide for its verdant flavour, and the king of all Greek olives - the Kalamata variety - grows not too far from Sparti. So, if you'd like to learn more about the region's most sought-after product, look no further than the Museum of the Olive and Olive Oil. This beautifully laid-out museum is one of the top attractions in Sparti, and inside you can see how olive presses work - even by pushing a button yourself to operate one. With so much of Greece's economy (past and present) centred on olive oil production, it's fascinating to see how the humble green fruit has become such a key part of the country's identity.

While Sparti might not feature in most peoples' plans for a Greek odyssey, the place is still absolutely worth a visit. Whether you want to immerse yourself in its ancient culture or observe how its modern citizens live, there's a lot more to this typical Greek town than initially meets the eye.



HIKE UP MOUNT TAYGETOS

Standing at around 8,000 feet, Mount Taygetos is the tallest mountain in the Peloponnese peninsula. In the age of the Spartans, the foreboding mountain served as a natural defence against invaders, but it also served another, more gruesome, purpose. Criminals, the mentally ill, disabled children and others deemed 'unfit' to be a member of Spartan society were tossed into a deep chasm known as Kaiadas. Recent excavations from the University of Athens have confirmed findings of adult remains, but thus far, no unfortunate children have been found.

Today, Taygetos is a far cry from its ancient past, and the heavily wooded mountain is a popular hiking destination. Choose your route, starting from one of the villages around the base of the mountain, and hike its challenging paths. The east slope is where you'll find streams and forests, while the west slope is barren and features dramatic gullies. The best time to hike up the east slope is a day or so after it has rained - that way the intoxicating scent of the surrounding pine trees will be at its strongest.

For the adventurous, it's even possible to reach the summit, Profitis Ilias, where panoramic views of the gorgeous Peloponnese await you. Watching the Sun move across the sky from the top of this ancient peak is an experience that you will never forget.

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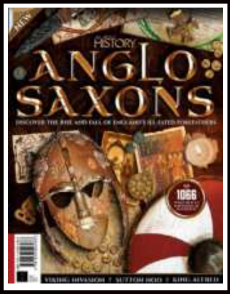
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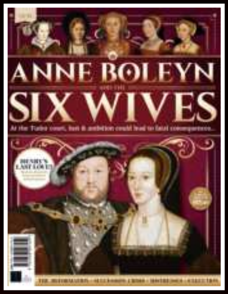
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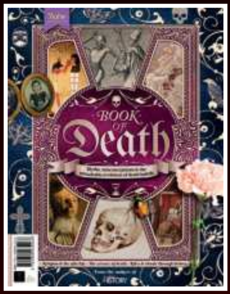
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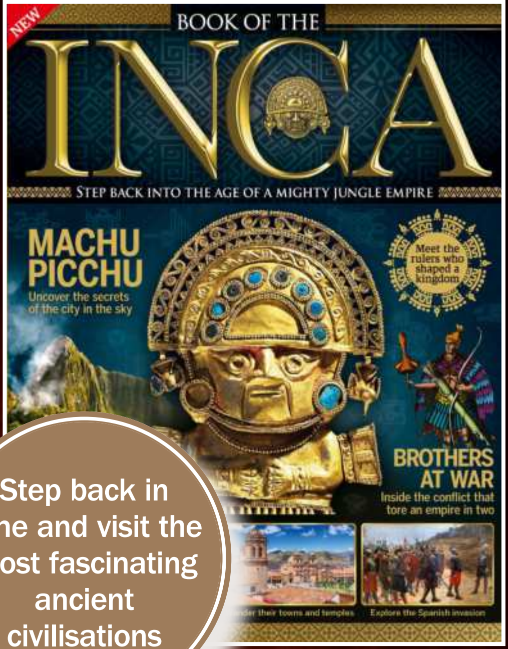
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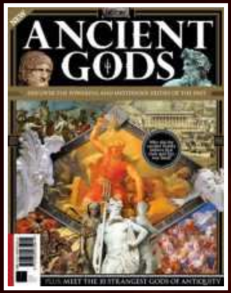
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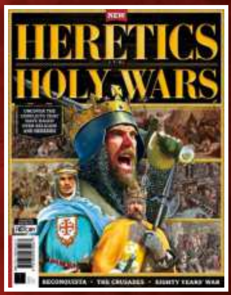
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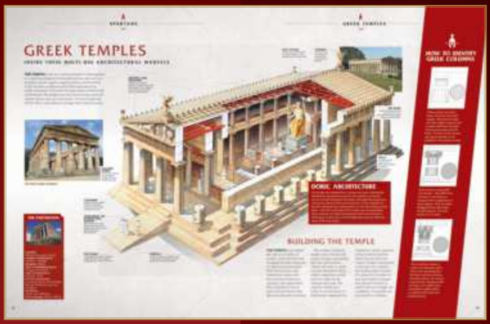

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